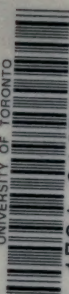


THE
JERVAISE COMEDY

BY ED. PEREFORD

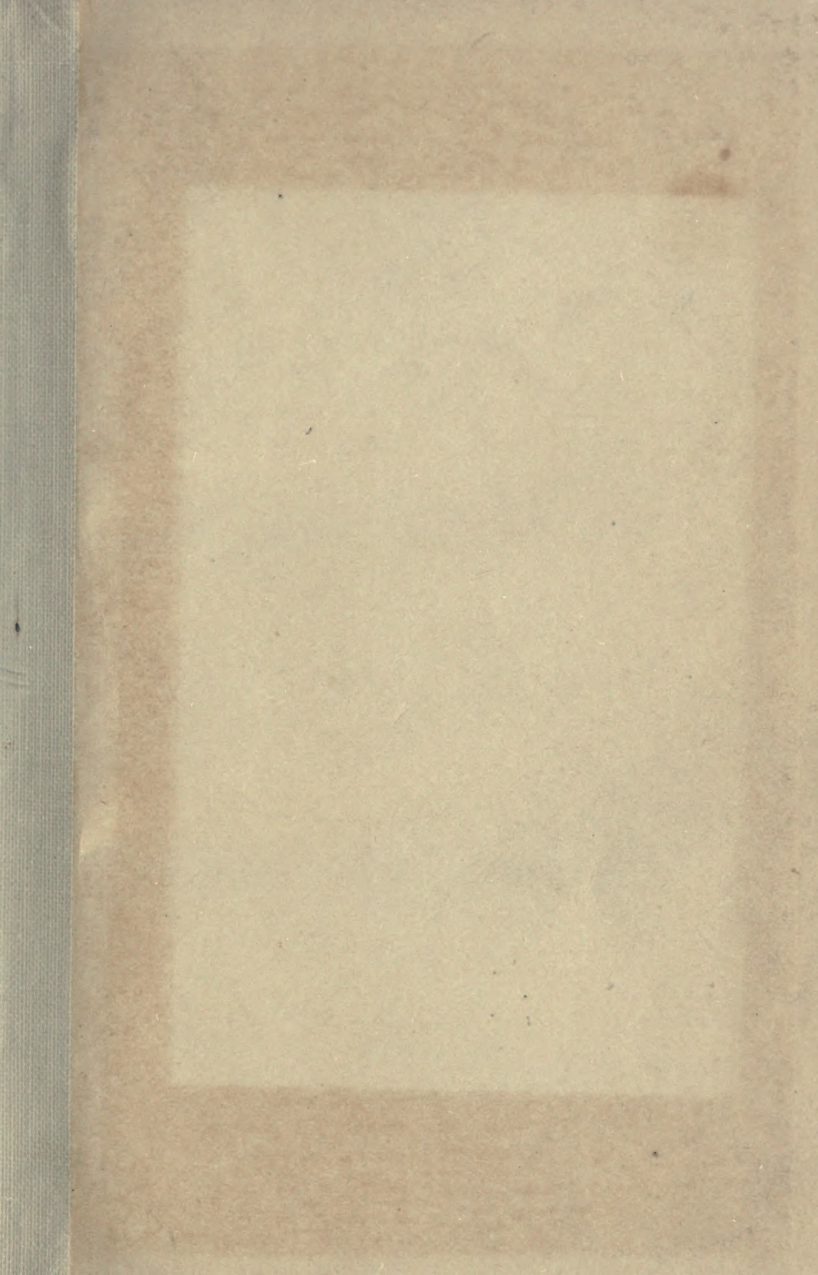
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01473879 3



Purchased for the Library of
The University of Toronto
out of the proceeds of the fund
bequeathed by
T. B. Phillips Stewart, B.A., LL.B.
OB. A.D. 1892.



THE JERVAISE COMEDY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

THE EARLY HISTORY OF JACOB STAHL	} A TRILOGY
A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH	
THE INVISIBLE EVENT	
THE HOUSE IN DEMETRIUS ROAD	
THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON	
THESE LYNNEKERS	
HOUSE-MATES	
GOD'S COUNTERPOINT	

FANTASIES

THE HAMPDENSHIRE WONDER
GOSLINGS

BELLES-LETTRES

H. G. WELLS
W. E. FORD: A BIOGRAPHY
(In collaboration with KENNETH RICHMOND)

COLLECTIONS

NINETEEN IMPRESSIONS

LE
B491je

THE JERVAISE COMEDY

BY
J. D. BERESFORD



156 280.
5.10.20.

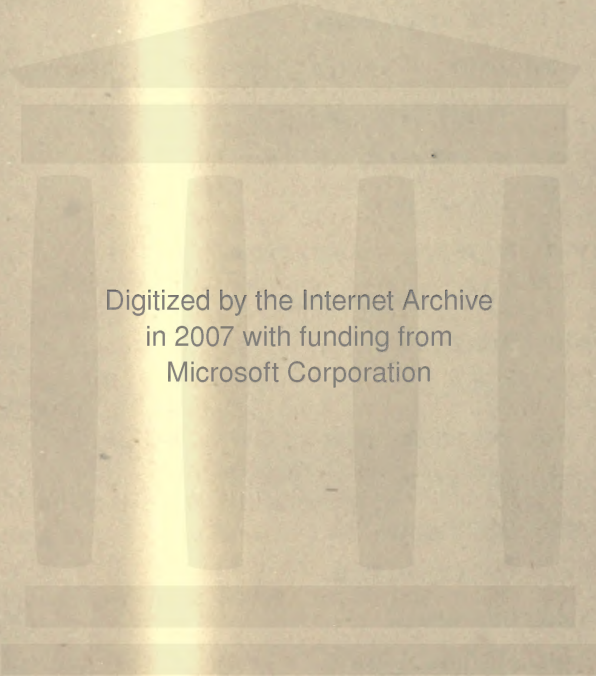
LONDON: 48 PALL MALL
W. COLLINS SONS & CO. LTD.
GLASGOW MELBOURNE AUCKLAND



Copyright 1919

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE FIRST HOUR	I
II. ANNE	20
III. FRANK JERVAISE	48
IV. IN THE HALL	64
V. DAYBREAK	80
VI. MORNING	96
VII. NOTES AND QUERIES	II4
VIII. THE OUTCAST	I26
IX. BANKS	I49
X. THE HOME FARM	I67
XI. THE STORY	I93
XII. CONVERSION	2I4
XIII. FARMER BANKS	233
XIV. MRS BANKS	25I
XV. REMEMBRANCE	262
POSTSCRIPT—THE TRUE STORY	280



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

I

THE FIRST HOUR

WHEN I was actually experiencing the thrill, it came delightfully, however, blended with a threat that proclaimed the imminent consequence of dismay. I appreciated the coming of the thrill, as a rare and unexpected 'dramatic moment.' I savoured and enjoyed it as a real adventure suddenly presented in the midst of the common business of life. I imaginatively transplanted the scene from the Hall of Thorp-Jervaise to a West-End theatre; and in my instant part of unoccupied spectator I admired the art with which the affair had been staged. It is so seldom that we are given an opportunity to witness one of these 'high moments,' and naturally enough I began instinctively to turn the scene into literature; admitting without hesitation, as I am often forced to admit, that the detail of reality is so much better and more typical than any I can invent.

But, having said that, I wonder how far one does invent in such an experience? The same night I hinted something of my appreciation of the dramatic quality of the stir at the Hall door

to Frank Jervaise, Brenda's brother, and he, quite obviously, had altogether missed that aspect of the affair. He scowled with that forensic, bullying air he is so successfully practising at the Junior Bar, as he said, 'I suppose you realise just what this may *mean*, to all of us?'

Jervaise evidently had failed to appreciate the detail that I had relished with such delight. He had certainly not savoured the quality of it. And in one sense I may claim to have invented the business of the scene. I may have added to it by my imaginative participation. In any case my understanding as interpreter was the prime essential—a fact that shows how absurd it is to speak of 'photographic detail' in literature, or indeed to attempt a proper differentiation between realism and romance.

We were all of us in the Hall, an inattentive, chattering audience of between twenty and thirty people. The last dance had been stopped at ten minutes to twelve, in order that the local parson and his wife—their name was Sturton—might be out of the house of entertainment before the first stroke of Sunday morning. Every one was wound up to a pitch of satisfied excitement. The Cinderella had been a success. The floor and the music and the supper had been good, Mrs Jervaise had thrown off her air of pre-occupation with some distasteful suspicion, and we had all been entertained and happy. And yet these causes for

satisfaction had been nothing more than a setting for Brenda Jervaise. It was she who had stimulated us, given us a lead and kept us dancing to the tune of her exciting personality. She had made all the difference between an ordinarily successful dance and what Mrs Sturton at the open door continually described as 'a really delightful evening.'

She had to repeat the phrase, because with the first stroke of midnight ringing out from the big clock over the stables, came also the first intimation of the new movement. Mrs Sturton's fly was mysteriously delayed; and I had a premonition even then, that the delay promised some diversion. The tone of the stable clock had its influence, perhaps. It was so precisely the tone of a stage clock—high and pretentious, and with a disturbing suggestion of being unmelodiously flawed.

Miss Tattersall, Olive Jervaise's friend, a rather abundant fair young woman, warmed by excitement to the realisation that she must flirt with some one, also noticed the theatrical sound of that announcement of midnight. She giggled a little nervously as stroke succeeded stroke in an apparently unending succession.

'It seems as if it were going on all night,' she said to me, in a self-conscious voice, as if the sound of the bell had some emotional effect upon her.

'It's because it's out of place,' I said for the sake of saying something; 'theatrical and artificial, you know. It ought to be . . .' I did not know

quite what it ought to be and stopped in the middle of the sentence. I was aware of the wide open door, of the darkness beyond, and of the timid visiting of the brilliant, chattering crowd by the fragrance of scented night-stock—a delicate, wayward incursion that drifted past me like the spirit of some sweet, shabby fairy. What possible bell could be appropriate to that air? I began, stupidly, to recall the names of such flowers as bluebell, hare-bell, Canterbury-bell. In imagination I heard their chime as the distant tinkling of a fairy musical-box.

Miss Tattersall, however, took no notice of my failure to find the ideal. 'Yes, isn't it?' she said, and then the horrible striking ceased, and we heard little Nora Bailey across the Hall excitedly claiming that the clock had struck thirteen.

'I counted most carefully,' she was insisting.

'I can't think why that man doesn't come,' Mrs Sturton repeated in a raised voice, as if she wanted to still the superstitious qualms that Miss Bailey had started. 'I told him to come round at a quarter to twelve, so that there shouldn't be any mistake. It's very tiresome.' She paused on that and Jervaise was inspired to the statement that the fly came from the Royal Oak, didn't it, a fact that Mrs Sturton had already affirmed more than once.

'What makes it rather embarrassing for the dear Jervaises,' Miss Tattersall confided to me, 'is that

the other things aren't ordered till one—the Atkinsons' 'bus, you know, and the rest of 'em. Brenda persuaded Mrs Jervaise that we might go on for a bit after the vicar had gone.'

I wished that I could get away from Miss Tattersall; she intruded on my thoughts. I was trying to listen to a little piece that was unfolding in my mind, a piece that began with the coming of the spirit of the night-stock into this material atmosphere of heated, excited men and women. I realised that invasion as the first effort of the wild romantic night to enter the house; after that . . . After that I only knew that the consequences were intensely interesting and that if I could but let my thoughts guide me, they would finish the story and make it exquisite.

'Oh! did she?' I commented automatically, and cursed myself for having conveyed a warmth of interest I certainly did not feel.

'She's so enthusiastic, isn't she? Brenda, I mean,' Miss Tattersall went on, and as I listened I compared her to the stable-clock. She, too, was a persistent outrage, a hindrance to whatever it was that I was waiting for.

Mrs Sturton and her husband were coming back, with an appearance of unwillingness, into the warmth and light of the hall. The dear lady was still at her congratulations on the delightfulness of the evening, but they were tempered, now, by a hint of apology for 'spoiling it—to a certain

extent—I hope I haven't—by this unfortunate contretemps.'

The Jervaises were uncomfortably warm in their reassurances. They felt, no doubt, the growing impatience of all their other visitors pressing forward with the reminder that if the Sturtons' cab did not come at once, there would be no more dancing.

Half-way up the stairs little Nora Bailey's high laughing voice was embroidering her statement with regard to the extra stroke of the stable-clock.

'I had a kind of premonition that it was going to, as soon as it began,' she was saying.

Gordon Hughes was telling the old story of the sentry who had saved his life by a similar counting of the strokes of midnight.

And at the back of my mind my dæmon was still thrusting out little spurts of enthralling allegory. The Sturtons and Jervaises had been driven in from the open. They were taking refuge in their house. Presently . . .

'Given it up?' I remarked with stupid politeness to Miss Tattersall.

'They've sent John round to the stables to inquire,' she told me.

I do not know how she knew. 'John' was the only man-servant that the Jervaises employed in the house; butler, footman, valet, and goodness knows what else.

'Mrs Sturton seems to be afraid of the night-air,'

Miss Tattersall remarked with a complacent giggle of self-congratulation on being too modern for such prejudices. 'I simply love the night-air, don't you?' she continued. 'I often go out for a stroll in the garden the last thing.'

I guessed her intention, but I was not going to compromise myself by strolling about the Jervaise domain at midnight with Grace Tattersall.

'Do you? Yes,' I agreed, as if I were bound to admire her originality.

They are afraid of the night-air, my allegory went on, and having begun their retreat, they are now sending out their servant for help. I began to wonder if I were composing the plot of a grand opera?

John's return convinced me that I was not to be disappointed in my expectation of drama.

He came out from under the staircase through the red baize door which discreetly warned the stranger that beyond this danger signal lay the sacred mysteries of the Hall's service. And he came down to the central cluster of faintly irritated Sturtions and Jervaises, with an evident hesitation that marked the gravity of his message. Every one was watching that group under the electric-lighted chandelier—it was posed to hold the stage—but I fancy that most of the audience were solely interested in getting rid of the unhappy Sturtions.

We could not hear what John said, but we inferred the general nature of the disaster from the response accorded to his news. The vicar merely clicked his tongue with a frown of grave disapproval, but his wife advertised the disaster for us by saying,—

‘It’s that man Carter, from the Oak, you know; not our own man. I’ve never liked Carter.’

‘Quite hopelessly, eh?’ Jervaise asked John, and John’s perturbed shake of the head answered that question beyond any doubt.

‘In any case,’ Mrs Sturton began, and I hazarded a guess that she was going to refuse to drive behind Carter in any stage of intoxication; but she decided to abandon that line and went on with a splendid imitation of cheerfulness, ‘However, there’s nothing to be done, now, but walk. It’s quite a fine night, fortunately.’ She looked at her husband for approval.

‘Oh! quite, quite,’ he said. ‘A beautiful night. Let us walk by all means.’

A general rustle of relief spread up the gallery of the staircase, and was followed at once by a fresh outburst of chatter. The waiting audience of would-be dancers had responded like one individual. It was as if their single over-soul had sighed its thankfulness and had then tried to cover the solecism. Their relief was short-lived. Mrs Jervaise ‘couldn’t think’ of the Sturtons walking. They must have the motor. She insisted.

Really nothing at all. Their chauffeur was sure to be up, still.

'Of course, certainly, by all means,' Jervaise agreed warmly, and then, to John, 'He hasn't gone to bed yet, I suppose?'

'I saw him not half an hour ago, sir,' was John's response.

'Tell him to bring the motor round,' Jervaise ordered, and added something in a lower voice, which, near as I was to them, I could not catch. I imagined that it might be an instruction to have the chauffeur out again if he had by any chance slunk off to bed within the last half-hour.

I think Miss Tattersall said 'Damn!' Certainly the over-soul of the staircase group thought it.

'They'll be here all night, at this rate,' was my companion's translation of the general feeling.

'If they have to wake up the chauffeur,' I admitted.

'He's a new man they've got,' Miss Tattersall replied. 'They've only had him three months . . .' It seemed as if she were about to add some further comment, but nothing came.

'Oh!' was all that I found appropriate.

I felt that the action of my opera was hanging fire. Indeed, every one was beginning to feel it. The Hall door had been shut against the bane of the night-air. The stimulus of the fragrant night-stock had been excluded. Miss Tattersall pretended not to yawn. We all pretended that we did not

feel a craving to yawn. The chatter rose and fell spasmodically in short devitalised bursts of polite effort.

I looked round for Brenda, but could not see her anywhere.

'Won't you come back into the drawing-room?' Mrs Jervaise was saying to the Sturtons.

'Oh! thank you, it's *hardly* worth while, is it?' Mrs Sturton answered effusively, but she loosened the shawl that muffled her throat as if she were preparing for a longer wait. 'I'm *so* sorry,' she apologised for the seventh time. 'So very unfortunate after such a really delightful evening.'

They kept up that kind of conversation for quite a long time, while we listened eagerly for the sound of the motor-horn.

And no motor-horn came; instead, after endlessly tedious minutes, John returned bearing himself like a portent of disaster.

The confounded fellow whispered again.

'What, not anywhere?' Jervaise asked irritably. 'Sure he hasn't gone to bed?'

John said something in that too discreet voice of his, and then Jervaise scowled and looked round at the ascending humanity of the staircase. His son Frank detached himself from the swarm, politely picked his way down into the Hall, and began to put John under a severe cross-examination.

'What's up now, do you suppose?' Miss

Tattersall asked, with the least tremor of excitement sounding in her voice.

'Perhaps the chauffeur has followed the example of Carter, and afterwards hidden his shame,' I suggested.

I was surprised by the warmth of her contradiction. 'Oh, no,' she said. 'He isn't the least that sort of man.' She said it as if I had aspersed the character of one of her friends.

'He seems to have gone, disappeared, anyway,' I replied.

'It's getting frightfully mysterious,' Miss Tattersall agreed, and added inconsequently, 'He's got a strong face, you know; keen—looks as if he'd get his own way about things, though, of course, he isn't a gentleman.'

I had a suspicion that she had been flirting with the romantic chauffeur. She was the sort of young woman who would flirt with any one.

I wished they would open that Hall door again. The action of my play had become dispersed and confused. Frank Jervaise had gone off through the baize door with John, and the Sturtons and their host and hostess were moving reluctantly towards the drawing-room.

'We might almost as well go and sit down somewhere,' I suggested to Miss Tattersall, and noted three or four accessible blanks on the staircase.

'Almost,' she agreed after a glance at the closed door that shut out the night.

In the re-arrangement I managed to leave her on a lower step, and climbed to the throne of the gods, at present occupied only by Gordon Hughes, one of Frank Jervaise's barrister friends from the Temple. Hughes was reputed 'brilliantly clever.' He was a tallish fellow with ginger red hair and a long nose—the foxy type.

'Rum start!' I cried, by way of testing his intellectual quality, but before I could get on terms with him, the stage was taken by a dark, curly-haired, handsome boy of twenty-four or so, generally addressed as 'Ronnie.' I had thought him very like a well-intentioned retriever pup. I could imagine him worrying an intellectual slipper to pieces with great gusto.

'I say, it's all U.P. now,' he said, in a dominating voice. 'What's the time?' He was obviously too well turned out to wear a watch with evening dress.

Some one said it was 'twenty-five to one.'

'Fifty to one against another dance, then,' Ronnie barked joyously.

'Unless you'll offer yourself up as a martyr in a good cause,' suggested Nora Bailey.

'Offer myself up? How?' Ronnie asked.

'Take 'em home in your car,' Nora said in a penetrating whisper.

'Dead the other way,' was Ronnie's too patent excuse.

'It's only a couple of miles through the Park,

you know,' Olive Jervaise put in. 'You might easily run them over to the vicarage and be back again in twenty minutes.'

'By Jove; yes. So I might,' Ronnie acknowledged. 'That is, if I may really come back, Miss Jervaise. Awfully good of you to suggest it. I didn't bring my man with me, though. I'll have to go and wind up the old buzz-wagon myself, if your fellow can't be found. Do you think . . . could any one . . .'

He was looking round, searching for some one who was not there.

'Want any help?' Hughes asked.

'No thanks. That's all right. I know where the car is, I mean,' Ronnie said, and still hesitated as if he were going to finish the question he had begun in his previous speech.

Olive Jervaise anticipated, I think wrongly, his remark. 'They're in the drawing-room,' she said. 'Will you tell them?'

'Better get the car round first, hadn't I?' Ronnie asked.

The sandy Atkinson youth found an answer for that. He cleared his long, thin throat huskily and said, 'Might save time to tell 'em first. They'd be ready, then, when you came round.' His two equally sandy sisters clucked their approval.

'All serene,' Ronnie agreed.

He was on the bottom step of the stairs when the Hall door was thrown wide open and Frank Jervaise returned.

He stood there a moment, posed for us, searching the ladder of our gallery; and the spirit of the night-stock drifted past him and lightly touched us all as it fled up the stairs. Then he came across the Hall, and addressing his sister, asked, in a voice that overstressed the effect of being casual, 'I say, Olive, you don't happen to know where Brenda is, do you?'

I suppose our over-soul knew everything in that minute. A tremor of dismay ran up our ranks like the sudden passing of a cold wind. Every one was looking at Ronnie.

Olive Jervaise's reply furnished an almost superfluous corroboration. She could not control her voice. She tried to be as casual as her brother, and failed lamentably. 'Brenda was here just now,' she said. 'She—she must be somewhere about.'

Ronnie, still the cynosure of the swarm, turned himself about and stared at Frank Jervaise. But it was Gordon Hughes who demonstrated his power of quick inference and response, although in doing it he overstepped the bounds of decency by giving a voice to our suspicions.

'Is the car in the garage? Your own car?' he asked.

'Yes. Rather. Of course,' Jervaise replied uneasily.

'You've just looked?' Hughes insisted.

'I know the car's there,' was Jervaise's huffy

evasion, and he took Ronnie by the arm and led him off into the drawing-room.

The Hall door stood wide open, and the tragedy of the night flowed unimpeded through the house.

Although the horror had not been named we all recognised its finality. We began to break up our formation immediately, gabbling tactful irrelevancies about the delightful evening, the delinquent Carter, and the foolishness of sabbatarianism. Mrs Atkinson appeared in the Hall, cloaked and muffled, and beckoned to her three replicas. She announced that their omnibus was 'just coming round.'

In the general downward drift of dispersion I saw Grace Tattersall looking up at me with an expression that suggested a desire for the confidential discussion of scandal, and I hastily whispered to Hughes that we might go to the extemporised buffet in the supper-room and get a whisky and seltzer or something. He agreed with an alacrity that I welcomed at the time, but regret, now, because our retirement into duologue took us out of the important movement, and I missed one or two essentials of the development.

The truth is that we were all overcome at the moment by an irresistible desire to appear tactful. We wanted to show the Jervaises that we had not suspected anything, or that if we had, we didn't mind in the least, and it certainly wasn't their fault. Nevertheless, I saw no reason why in the

privacy of the supper-room—we had the place to ourselves—I should not talk to Hughes. I had never before that afternoon met any of the Jervaise family except Frank, and on one or two occasions his younger brother who was in the army and, now, in India; and I thought that this was an appropriate occasion to improve my knowledge. I understood that Hughes was an old friend of the family.

He may have been, although the fact did not appear in his conversation; for I discovered almost immediately that he was, either by nature or by reason of his legal training, cursed with a procrastinating gift of diplomacy.

‘Awkward affair!’ I began as soon as we had got our whiskies and lighted cigarettes.

Hughes drank with a careful slowness, put his glass down with superfluous accuracy, and then after another instant of tremendous deliberation, said ‘What is?’

‘Well, this,’ I returned gravely.

‘Meaning?’ he asked judicially.

‘Of course it may be too soon to draw an inference,’ I said.

‘Especially with no facts to draw them from,’ he added.

‘All the same,’ I went on boldly, ‘it looks horribly suspicious.’

‘What does?’

I began to lose patience with him. ‘I’m not

suggesting that the Sturtons' man from the Royal Oak has been murdered,' I said.

He weighed that remark as if it might cover a snare, before he scored a triumph of allusiveness by replying, 'Fellow called Carter. He's got a blue nose.'

Despite my exasperation I tried once more on a note of forced geniality, 'What sort of man is this chauffeur of the Jervaises? Do you know him at all?'

'Wears brown leather gaiters,' Hughes answered after another solemn deliberation.

I could have kicked him with all the pleasure in life. His awful guardedness made me feel as if I were an inquisitive little journalist trying to ferret out some unsavoury scandal. And he had been the first person to point the general suspicion a few minutes earlier, by his inquiry about the motor. I decided to turn the tables on him, if I could manage it.

'I asked because you seemed to suggest just now that he had gone off with the Jervaises' motor,' I remarked.

Hughes stroked his long thin nose with his thumb and forefinger. It seemed to take him about a minute from bridge to nostril. Then he inhaled a long draught of smoke from his cigarette, closed one eye as if it hurt him, and threw back his head to blow out the smoke again with a slow gasp of relief.

'One never knows,' was all the explanation he vouchsafed after this tedious performance.

'Whether a chauffeur will steal his master's motor?' I asked.

'Incidentally,' he said.

'But, good heavens, if he's that sort of man . . . ' I suggested.

'I'm not saying that he is,' Hughes replied.

I realised then that his idea of our conversation was nothing more nor less than that of a game to be played as expertly as possible. He had all the makings of a cabinet minister, but as a companion he was, on this occasion, merely annoying. I felt that I could stand no more of him, and I was trying to frame a sentence that would convey my opinion of him without actual insult, when Frank Jervaise looked in at the door.

He stared at us suspiciously, but his expression commonly conveyed some aspect of threat or suspicion. 'Been looking all over the place for you,' he said.

'For me?' Hughes asked.

Jervaise shook his head. 'No, I want Melhuish,' he said, and stood scowling.

'Well, here I am,' I prompted him.

'If I'm in the way . . . ' Hughes put in, but did not attempt to get himself out of it.

Jervaise ignored him. 'Look here, Melhuish,' he said. 'I wonder if you'd mind coming up with me to the Home Farm?'

'Oh! no; rather not,' I agreed gladly.

I felt that Hughes had been scored off; but I instantly forgot such small triumphs in the delight of being able to get out into the night. Out there was romance and the smell of night-stock, all kinds of wonderment and adventure. I was so eager to be in the midst of it that I never paused to consider the queerness of the expedition.

As we left the Hall, the theatrical stable clock was just striking one

II

ANNE

THE moon must have been nearly at the full, but I could not guess its position behind the even murk of cloud that muffled the whole face of the sky. Yet, it was not very dark. The broad masses of the garden through which Jervaise led me, were visible as a greater blackness superimposed on a fainter background. I believed that we were passing through some kind of formal pleasance. I could smell the pseudo-aromatic, slightly dirty odour of box, and made out here and there the clipped artificialities of a yew hedge. There were standard roses, too. One rose started up suddenly before my face, touching me as I passed with a limp, cool caress, like the careless, indifferent encouragement of a preoccupied courtesan.

At the end of the pleasance we came to a high wall, and as Jervaise fumbled with the fastening of a, to me, invisible door, I was expecting that now we should come out into the open, into a paddock, perhaps, or a grass road through the Park. But beyond the wall was a kitchen garden. It was lighter there, and I could see dimly that we were passing down an aisle of old espaliers

that stretched sturdy, rigid arms, locked finger to finger with each other in their solemn grotesque guardianship of the enceinte they enclosed. No doubt in front of them was some kind of herbaceous border. I caught sight of the occasional spire of a hollyhock, and smelt the acid insurgence of marigolds.

None of this was at all the mischievous, taunting fairyland that I had anticipated, but rather the gaunt, intimidating home of ogres, rank and more than a trifle forbidding. It had an air of age that was not immortal, but stiffly declining into a stubborn resistance against the slow rigidity of death. These espaliers made me think of rheumatic veterans, obstinately faithful to ancient duties—veterans with knobbly arthritic joints.

At the end of the aisle we came to a high-arched opening in the ten-foot wall, barred by a pair of heavy iron gates.

‘Hold on a minute, I’ve got the key,’ Jervaise said. This was the first time he had spoken since we left the house. His tone seemed to suggest that he was afraid I should attempt to scale the wall or force my way through the bars of the gates.

He had the key but he could not in that darkness fit it into the padlock; and he asked me if I had any matches. I had a little silver box of wax vestas in my pocket, and struck one to help him in his search for the keyhole which we found to have been covered by the escutcheon. Before I

threw the match away I held it up and glanced back across the garden. The shadows leaped and stiffened to attention, and I flung the match away, but it did not go out. It lay there on the path throwing out its tiny challenge to the darkness. It was still burning when I looked back after passing through the iron gates.

As we came out of the park, Jervaise took my arm.

'I'm afraid this is a pretty rotten business,' he said with what was for him an unusual cordiality.

Although I had never before that afternoon seen Jervaise's home nor any of his people with the exception of the brother now in India, I had known Frank Jervaise for fifteen years. We had been at Oakstone together, and had gone up the school form by form in each other's company. After we left Oakstone we were on the same landing at Jesus, and he rowed 'two' and I rowed 'bow' in the college boat. And since we had come down I had met him constantly in London, often as it seemed by accident. Yet we had never been friends. I had never really liked him.

Even at school he had had the beginning of the artificially bullying manner which now seemed natural to him. He had been unconvincingly blunt and insolent. His dominant chin, Roman nose, and black eyebrows were chiefly responsible, I think, for his assumption of arrogance. He must

have been newly invigorated to carry on the part every time he scowled at himself in the glass. He could not conceivably have been anything but a barrister.

But, to-night, in the darkness, he seemed to have forgotten for once the perpetual mandate of his facial angle. He was suddenly intimate, almost humble.

'Of course, you don't realise how cursedly awkward it all is,' he said with the evident desire of opening a confidence.

'Tell me as little or as much as you like,' I responded. 'You know that I . . .'

'Yes, rather,' he agreed warmly, and added, 'I'd sooner Hughes didn't know.'

'He guesses a lot, though,' I put in. 'I suppose they all do.'

'Oh! well, they're bound to guess something,' he said, 'but I'm hoping we'll be able to put that right, now.'

'Who are we going to see?' I asked.

He did not reply at once, and then snapped out, 'Anne Banks; friend er Brenda's.'

My foolishly whimsical imagination translated that queer medley of sounds into the thought of a stable-pump. I heard the clank of the handle and then the musical rush of water into the pail.

'Sounds just like a pump,' I said thoughtlessly.

He half withdrew his arm from mine with an abrupt twitch that indicated temper.

'Oh! don't for God's sake play the fool,' he said brutally.

A spasm of resentment shook me for a moment. I felt annoyed, remembering how at school he would await his opportunity and then score off me with some insulting criticism. He had never had any kind of sympathy for the whimsical, and it is a manner that is apt to look inane and ridiculous under certain kinds of censure. I swallowed my annoyance, on this occasion. I remembered that Jervaise had a reasonable excuse, for once.

'Sorry,' I said. 'I didn't mean to play the fool. But you must admit that it had a queer sound.' I repeated the adjectival sentence under my breath. It really was a rather remarkable piece of onomatopœia. And then I reflected on the absurdity of our conversation. How could we achieve all this ordinary trivial talk of everyday in the gloom of this romantic adventure?

'Oh! all serene,' Jervaise returned, still with the sound of irritation in his voice, and continued as if the need for confidence had suddenly overborne his anger. 'As a matter of fact she's his sister.'

'Whose sister?' I asked, quite at a loss.

'Oh! Banks's, of course,' he said.

'But who in the name of goodness is Banks?' I inquired irritably. The petulant tone was merely an artifice. I realised that if I were meek, he would lose more time in abusing my apparent imbecility.

I know that the one way to beat a bully is by bullying, but I hate even the pretence of that method.

Jervaise grunted as if the endeavour to lift the weight of my ignorance required an almost intolerable physical effort.

'Why, this fellow—our chauffeur,' he said in a voice so threateningly restrained that he seemed on the point of bursting.

There was no help for it; I had to take the upper hand.

'Well, my good idiot,' I said, 'you can't expect me to know these things by intuition. I've never heard of the confounded fellow before. Haven't even seen him, now. Nor his sister—Anne Banks, Frienderbrenda's.'

Jervaise was calmed by this outburst. This was the sort of attitude he could understand and appreciate.

'All right, keep your shirt on,' he replied quite amicably.

'If you'd condescend to explain,' I returned as huffily as I could.

'You see, this chap, Banks,' he began, 'isn't quite the ordinary chauffeur Johnnie. He's the son of one of our farmers. Decent enough old fellow, too, in his way—the father, I mean. Family's been tenants of the Home Farm for centuries. And this chap, Banks, the son, has knocked about the world, no end. Been in Canada

and the States and all kinds of weird places. He's hard as nails; and keen. His mother was a French-woman; been a governess.'

'Is she dead?' I asked.

'Lord, no. Why should she be?' Jervaise replied peevishly.

I thought of explaining that he had made the implication by his use of the past tense, but gave up the idea as involving a waste of energy. 'How old is this chap, Banks; the son?' I asked.

'I don't know,' Jervaise said. 'About twenty-five.'

'And his sister?' I prodded him.

'Rather younger than that,' he said, after an evident hesitation, and added; 'She's frightfully pretty.'

I checked my natural desire to comment on the paradox; and tried the stimulation of an interested 'Is she?'

'Rather.' He tacked that on in the tone of one who deploras the inevitable; and went on quickly, 'You needn't infer that I've made an ass of myself or that I'm going to. In our position . . .' He abandoned that as being, perhaps, too obvious. 'What I mean to say is,' he continued, 'that I can't understand about Brenda. And it was such an infernally silly way of going about things. Admitted that there was no earthly chance of the pater giving his consent or anything like it; she needn't in any case have made a damned spectacle

of the affair. But that's just like her. Probably did it all because she wanted to be dramatic or some rot.'

It was then that I expressed my appreciation of the dramatic quality of the incident, and was snubbed by his saying,—

'I suppose you realise just what this may *mean*, to all of us.'

I had a vivid impression, in the darkness, of that sudden scowl which made him look so absurdly like a youthful version of Sir Edward Carson.

I was wondering why it should mean so much to all of them? Frank Jervaise had admitted, for all intents and purposes, that he was in love with the chauffeur's sister, so he, surely, need not have so great an objection. And, after all, why was the family of Jervaise so much better than the family of Banks?

'I suppose it would be very terrible for you all if she married this chap?' I said.

'Unthinkable,' Jervaise replied curtly.

'It would be worse in a way than your marrying the sister?'

'I should never be such an infernal fool as to do a thing like that,' he returned.

'Has she . . . have there been any tender passages between you and Miss Banks?' I asked.

'No,' he snapped viciously.

'You've been too careful?'

J.C.

c

'As a matter of fact, I don't think she likes me,' he said.

'Oh!' was all my comment.

I needed no more explanations; and I liked Jervaise even less than I had before. I began to wish that he had not seen fit to confide in me. I had, thoughtlessly, been dramatising the incident in my mind, but, now, I was aware of the unpleasant reality of it all. Particularly Jervaise's part in it.

'Can't be absolutely certain, of course,' he continued.

'But if she did like you?' I suggested.

'I've got to be very careful who I marry,' he explained. 'We aren't particularly well off. All our property is in land, and you know what sort of an investment that is, these days.'

I tried another line. 'And if you find your sister up at the Home Farm; and Banks; what are you going to do?'

'Kick him and bring her home,' he said decidedly.

'Nothing else for it, I suppose?' I replied.

'Obviously,' he snarled.

We had come into a wood and it was very dark under the trees. I wondered why I should restrain the impulse to strangle him and leave him there? He was no good, and, to me, quite peculiarly objectionable. It seemed, in what was then my rather fantastic state of mind, that it would be a

triumph of whimsicality. I should certainly have resisted the impulse in any case, but my attention was diverted from it at that moment by a sudden pattering of feet along the leaves of the great trees under which we were walking—light, clean, sharp, little dancing feet, springing from leaf to leaf—dozens of them chasing each other, rattling ecstatically up and down the endless terraces of wide foliage.

'Damn it all, it's beginning to rain like blazes,' remarked the foolish Jervaise.

'How much farther is it?' I asked.

He said we were 'just there.'

I saw the Home Farm first as a little square haze of yellow light far up in the sky. I didn't realise the sharp rise in the ground immediately in front of us, and that rectangular beacon, high in the air, seemed a fantastically impossible thing. I pointed it out to Jervaise who was holding his head down as if he were afraid the summer rain might do some serious injury to his face.

'Some one up, anyway,' was his comment.

'Very far up,' I murmured. I could not quite believe, even then, that it could be a window. I was disappointed when we had climbed the hill and stood only a few feet below the beacon, to discover that this too, was another instance of the all too credible commonplace. I suppose men like Frank Jervaise never long to believe in the

impossible. I was, however, agreeably surprised to find that he could be nervous.

He hesitated, looking up at the prism of light that splayed out through the first floor window, and set a silver fire to the falling rain. 'Suppose we'd better knock,' he grumbled.

'D'you know whose window it is?' I asked.

Apparently he didn't. He made a dive into a deeper obscurity and I lost him until I heard his knock. I was glad that he should have knocked with such decent restraint, but all the effect of it was instantly shattered by the response. For at his first subdued rap, a dog with a penetratingly strident bark set up a perfectly detestable clamour within the house. It was just as if Jervaise's touch on the door had liberated the spring of some awful rattle. Every lovely impulse of the night must have fled dismayed, back into the peace and beauty of the wood; and I was more than half inclined to follow.

Until that appalling racket was set loose I had been regarding this midnight visit to the farm as a natural and enticing adventure, altogether in keeping with the dramatic movement preluded by the chime of the stable-clock. That confounded terrier, whose voice so clearly proclaimed his breed, had dragged us down to the baldest realism. We were intruders upon the decencies of civilisation. That dog was not to be misled by any foolish whimsies of the imagination. He was a thorough-

going realist, living in a tangible, smellable world of reality, and he knew us for what we were—marauders, disturbers of the proper respectable peace of twentieth century farms. He lashed himself into ecstasies of fury against our unconventionality; he rose to magnificent paroxysms of protest that passionately besought High Heaven and Farmer Banks to open the door and let him get at us.

But no one came. There may have been other sounds coming from the house besides that infuriated demand for vengeance, but all inferior noises—and surely all other noises must have been inferior to that clamour—were absorbed and flattened out of existence. We were in a world occupied by the bark of a single dog, and any addition to that occupation would have been superfluous.

The owner of the voice was doing his level best now to get the door down on his own account. I hoped he might succeed. I should have excused then to fly to the woods and claim sanctuary. As it was, I retreated a couple of steps, holding my breath to ease the pain of my nerves, and some old instinct of prayer made me lift my face to the sky. I welcomed the cold, inquisitive touch of the silent rain.

Then I became aware through the torture of prolonged exasperation that my upturned face was lit from above; that a steady candle was

now perched on the very sill of the one illuminated window; and that behind the candle the figure of a woman stood looking down at me.

She appeared to be speaking.

I held my hands to my ears and shook my head violently to intimate my temporary deafness; and the figure disappeared, leaving the placid candle to watch me as it seemed with a kind of indolent nonchalance.

I decided to pass on the news to Jervaise, and discovered that besotted fool in a little trellised porch, stimulating the execrations of the Irish terrier by a subdued inaudible knocking. I was beginning to scream my news into his ear when silence descended upon us with the suddenness of a catastrophe. It was as if the heavens had been rent and all the earth had fallen into a muffled chaos of mute despair.

I had actually began my shriek of announcement when all the world of sound about us so inexplicably ceased to be, and I shut off instantly on the word '*Someone . . .*,' a word that as I had uttered it sounded like a despairing yelp of mortal agony.

Out of the unearthly stillness, Jervaise's voice replied in a frightened murmur. '*Someone coming,*' he said, as if he, alone, had knowledge of and responsibility for that supreme event.

And still no one came. The door remained steadfastly closed. Outside the porch, the earth had

recovered from the recent disaster, and we could hear the exquisitely gentle murmur of the rain.

'Damned odd,' commented Jervaise. 'That cursed dog made enough noise to wake the dead.'

I was inspired to go out and search the window where burned the indigent, just perceptibly, rakish candle.

She was there. She had returned to her eyrie after quelling the racket in the hall, and now she leaned a little forward so that I could see her face.

'Who's there?' she asked quietly.

Her voice was low and clear as the reed of a flute, but all sounds had the quality of music at that instant of release.

I was nonplussed for the moment. I ought to have taken up the key of high romance. She deserved it. Instead of that I dropped to the awful commonplaces of a man in evening dress and a light overcoat standing in the rain talking to a stranger.

'I came up with Mr Jervaise, Mr Frank Jervaise,' I explained. 'He—he wants to see you. Shall I tell him you're there?'

'All serene, I'm here,' whispered the voice of Jervaise at my elbow, and then he cleared his throat and spoke up at the window.

'Rather an upset down at the Hall, Miss Banks; about Brenda,' he said. 'Might we come in a minute?'

'It's rather late, isn't it?' the vision returned—

it wasn't only the ease of the silence, she had a delicious voice—and added rather mischievously, 'It's raining, isn't it?'

'Like anything,' Jervaise said, and ducked his head and hunched his shoulders, as if he had suddenly remembered the possible susceptibility of his exposed face.

'Is it so very important?' the soft, clear voice asked, still, I thought, with a faint undercurrent of raillery.

'Really, Miss Banks, it *is*,' Jervaise implored, risking his delicate face again.

She hesitated a moment and then said, 'Very well,' and disappeared, taking this time the dissipated candle with her. I heard her address a minatory remark within the room to 'Racket'—most excellently described, I thought; though I discovered later that I had, in imagination, mis-spelt him, since he owed his name to the fact that his mother had sought her delivery on the bed of a stored tennis-net.

Jervaise and I hurried back to the front door as if we were afraid that Miss Banks might get there first; but she kept us waiting for something like ten minutes before she came downstairs. The silence of that interval was only broken by such nervous staccato comments as 'Long time!' 'Dressing, presumably,' and occasional throaty sounds of impatience from Jervaise that are beyond the representative scope of typography. I have

heard much the same noises proceed from the throat of an unhopeful pig engaged in some minor investigation.

The rain was falling less heavily, and towards the west a pale blur of light was slowly melting its way through the darkness. I noted that spot as marking the probable position of the setting moon. I decided that as soon as this infernal inquisition was over, I would get rid of Jervaise and find some God-given place in which I might wait for the dawn. I knew that there must be any number of such places between the Farm and the Hall. I was peering westward towards the rolling obscurity of hills and woods that were just beginning to bulk out of the gloom, when I heard the click of the door latch.

I should not like to be put in the witness-box and cross-examined by Jervaise as to my reason for entering the house with him that night. All that part of me with which I have any sort of real friendship, wanted quite definitely to stay outside. That would have been the tactful thing to do. There was no reason why I should intrude further on the mystery of Brenda's disappearance; and as a matter of fact I was no longer very keenly interested in that brilliant and fascinating young woman's affairs. The plan that I had in mind when the door opened was to say politely to Jervaise, 'I'll wait for you here'—I had a premonition that he would raise no objection to that suggestion—

and then when he and Miss Banks were safely inside, I meant to go and find rapture in solitude. The moon was certainly coming out; the dawn was due in three hours or so, and before me were unknown hills and woods. I had no sort of doubt that I should find my rapture. I may add that my plan did not include any further sight of Jervaise, his family, or their visitors, before breakfast next morning.

I had it all clear and settled. I was already thrilling with the first ecstasies of anticipation. But when the door was opened I turned my back on all that magical beauty of the night, and accompanied Jervaise into the house like a scurvy little mongrel with no will of its own.

I can't account for that queer change of purpose. It was purely spontaneous, due to something quite outside the realm of reason. I was certainly not in love with Anne, then. My only sight of her had left an impression as of an amateur copy of a Rembrandt done in Indian ink with a wet brush. It is true that I had heard her voice like the low thrilling of a nightingale—following a full Handel chorus of corncrakes.

She had evidently spent an active ten minutes while we waited for her. She had done her hair, and she was, so far as I could judge from superficialities, completely dressed. Also she had lighted

the lamp in what I took to be the chief sitting-room of the farm.

As a room it deserved attention, but it was not until I had been there for ten minutes or more, that I realised all that the furniture of that room was not. My first observations were solely directed to Miss Banks.

Jervaise had grossly maligned her by saying that she was 'frightfully pretty.' No one but a fool would have called her 'pretty.' Either she was beautiful or plain. I saw, even then, that if the light of her soul had been quenched, she might appear plain. Her features were good, her complexion, her colouring—she was something between dark and fair—but she did not rely on those things for her beauty. It was the glow of her individuality that was her surpassing charm. She had that supremely feminine vitality which sends a man crazy with worship. You had to adore or dislike her. There was no middle course.

And Jervaise quite obviously adored her. All that tactful confession of his in the park had been a piece of artifice. It had not, however, been framed to deceive *me*. I do not believe that he considered me worth bothering about. No, those admissions and denials of his had been addressed, without doubt, to a far more important person than myself. They had been in the nature of a remonstrance and assurance spoken to Frank Jervaise by the heir to the estate; which heir was

determined with all the force of his ferocious nose and dominant chin to help him, that he would not make a fool of himself for the sake of the daughter of a tenant farmer. I had been nothing more than the register upon which he had tentatively engraved that resolve. But he should have chosen a more stable testament than this avowal made to a whimsically-minded playwright with an absurd weakness for the beauties of a midnight wood.

And if I had been a witness to his oath, I was, now, a witness to his forswearing.

He began well enough on the note proper to the heir of Jervaise. He had the aplomb to carry that off. He stood on the hearthrug, austere and self-controlled, consciously aristocrat, heir and barrister.

'I'm so sorry, Miss Banks. Almost inexcusable to disturb you at this time of night.' He stopped after that beginning and searched his witness with a stare that ought to have set her trembling.

Anne had sat down and was resting her forearms on the table. She looked up at him with the most charming insouciance when he paused so portentously at the very opening of his address. Her encouraging 'yes' was rather in the manner of a child waiting for the promised story.

Jervaise frowned and attempted the dramatic. 'My sister, Brenda, has run away,' he said.

'When?'

'This evening at the end of the Cinderella. You knew we were giving a dance?'

'But where to?'

'Oh! Precisely!' Jervaise said.

'But how extraordinary!' replied Miss Banks.

'Is she here?' asked Jervaise. He ought to have snapped that out viciously, and I believe that was his intention. But Anne's exquisitely innocent, absorbed gaze undid him; and his question had rather the sound of an apology.

'No, certainly not! Why ever should she come here?' Anne said with precisely the right nuance of surprise.

'Is your brother here?'

'No!'

It looks such an absurd little inexpressive word on paper, but Anne made a song of it on two notes, combining astonishment with a sincerity that was absolutely final. If, after that, Jervaise had dared to say, 'Are you sure?' I believe I should have kicked him.

How confounded he was, was shown by the change of attitude evident in his next speech.

'It's horribly awkward,' he said.

'Oh! horribly,' Anne agreed, with a charming sympathy. 'What are you going to do?'

'You see, we can't find your brother, either,' Jervaise tried tactfully.

'I don't quite see what that's got to do with Brenda,' Anne remarked with a sweet perplexity.

Apparently Jervaise did not wish to point the connection too abruptly. 'We wanted the car,' he said; 'and we couldn't find him anywhere.'

'Oh! he's almost sure to have gone to sleep up in the woods,' Anne replied. 'Arthur's like that, you know. He sort of got the habit in Canada or somewhere. He often says that sometimes he simply can't bear to sleep under a roof.'

I had already begun to feel a liking for Anne's brother, and that speech of hers settled me. I knew that 'Arthur' was the right sort—or, at least, my sort. I would have been willing, even then, to swap the whole Jervaise family with the possible exception of Brenda, for this as yet unknown Arthur Banks.

Jervaise's diplomacy was beginning to run very thin.

'You don't think it conceivable that Brenda...' he began gloomily.

'That Brenda what?'

'I was going to say . . .'

'Yes?' She leaned a little forward with an air of expectancy that disguised her definite refusal to end his sentences for him.

'It's a most difficult situation, Miss Banks,' he said, starting a new line; 'and we don't in the least know what to make of it. What on earth could induce Brenda to run off like this, with no apparent object?'

'But how do you know she really has?' asked

Anne. 'You haven't told me anything, yet, have you? I mean, she may have gone out into the Park to get cool after the dance, or into the woods or anything. Why should you imagine that she has—run away?'

I joined in the conversation, then, for the first time. I had not even been introduced to Anne. 'That's very reasonable, surely, Jervaise,' I said. 'And wouldn't it—I hardly know her, I'll admit—but wouldn't it be rather like your sister?' So far as I was concerned, Anne's suggestion carried conviction. I was suddenly sure that our suspicions were all a mistake.

Jervaise snubbed me with a brief glance of profoundest contempt. He probably intended that commentary on my interruption to go no further; but his confounded pose of superiority annoyed me to the pitch of exasperation.

'You see, my dear chap,' I continued quickly, 'your unfortunate training as a lawyer invariably leads you to suspect a crime; and you overlook the obvious in your perfectly unreasonable and prejudiced search for the incriminating.'

Jervaise's expression admirably conveyed his complete boredom with me and my speeches.

'You don't know anything about it,' he said, with a short gesture of final dismissal.

'But, Mr Jervaise,' Anne put in, 'what can you possibly suspect, in this case?'

'He'd suspect anything of anybody for the sake

of making a case of it,' I said, addressing Anne. I wanted to make her look at me, but she kept her gaze fixed steadily on Jervaise, as if he were the controller of all destinies.

I accepted my dismissal, then, so far as to keep silence, but I was annoyed, now, with Anne, as well as with Jervaise. 'What on earth could she see in the fellow?' I asked myself irritably. I was the more irritated because he had so obviously already forgotten my presence.

'Have you no reason to suspect anything yourself, Miss Banks?' he asked gravely.

'If you're suggesting that Brenda and Arthur have run away together,' she said, 'I'm perfectly, perfectly certain that you're wrong, Mr Jervaise.'

'Do you mean that you know for certain that they haven't?' he returned.

She nodded confidently, and I thought she had perjured herself, until Jervaise with evident relief said, 'I'm very glad of that; very. Do you mind telling me how you know?'

'By intuition,' she said, without a trace of raillery in her face or her tone.

I forgave her for ignoring me when she said that. I felt that I could almost forgive Jervaise; he was so deliciously sold.

'But you've surely some other grounds for certainty besides—intuition?' he insisted anxiously.

'What other ground could I possibly have?' Anne asked.

'They haven't, either of them, confided in you?'

'Confided? What sort of things?'

'That there was, or might be, any—any sort of understanding between them?'

'I know that they have met—occasionally.'

'Lately! Where?'

'Brenda has been having lessons in driving the motor.'

'Oh! yes, I know that. You didn't mean that they had been meeting here?'

'No, I didn't mean that,' Anne said definitely. All through that quick alternation of question and answer she had, as it were, surrendered her gaze to him; watching him with a kind of meek submission as if she were ready to do anything she could to help him in his inquiry. And it was very plain to me that Jervaise was flattered and pleased by her attitude. If I had attempted Anne's method, he would have scowled and brow-beaten me unmercifully, but now he really looked almost pleasant.

'It's very good of you to help me like this, Miss Banks,' he said, 'and I'm very grateful to you. I do apologise, most sincerely for dragging you out of bed at such an unholy hour, but I'm sure you appreciate my—our anxiety.'

'Oh! of course,' she agreed, with a look that I thought horribly sympathetic.

I began to wonder if my first estimate of her—based to a certain extent, perhaps, on Jervaise's

admission that she did not like him—had not been considerably too high. She might, after all, be just an ordinary charming woman, enlivened by a streak of minx, and eager enough to catch the heir of Jervaise if he were available. How low my thought of her must have sunk at that moment ! But they were, now, exchanging courtesies with an air that gave to their commonplaces the effect of a flirtation.

I distracted my attention. I couldn't help hearing what they said, but I could refrain from looking at Anne. She was becoming vivacious, and I found myself strangely disliking her vivacity. It was then that I began to take note of the furnishing of the room which, when I considered it, was so peculiarly not in the manner of the familiar English farm-house. Instead of the plush suite, the glass bell shades, the round centre table, and all the other stuffy misconceptions so firmly established by the civilisation of the nineteenth century, I discovered the authentic marks of the old English aesthetic—whitewashed walls and black oak. And the dresser, the settles, the oblong table, the rush-bottomed chairs, the big chest by the side wall, all looked sturdily genuine; venerably conscious of the boast that they had defied the greedy collector and would continue to elude his most insidious approaches. Here, they were in their proper surroundings. They gave the effect of having carelessly lounged in and settled themselves;

they were like the steady group of 'regulars' in the parlour of their familiar inn.

I came out of my reflection on the furniture to find that Jervaise was going, at last. He was smiling and effusive, talking quickly about nothing, apologising again for the unseemliness of our visit. Anne was pathetically complacent, accepting and discounting his excuses, and professing her willingness to help in any way she possibly could. 'But I really and truly expect you'll find Brenda safe at home when you get back,' she said, and I felt that she honestly believed that.

'I hope so; I hope so,' Jervaise responded, and then they most unnecessarily shook hands.

I thought that it was time to assert myself above the clatter of their farewells.

'We might add, Miss Banks,' I put in, 'that we've been making a perfectly absurd fuss about nothing at all. But, no doubt, you're used to that.'

She looked at me, then, for the first time since I had come into the house; and I saw the impulse to some tart response flicker in her face and die away unexpressed. We stood and stared at one another for a long half-second or so; and when she looked away I fancied that there was something like fear in her evasion. It seemed to me that I saw the true spirit of her in the way her glance refused me as some one with whom she did not care to sport. Her voice, too, dropped, so that I could not catch the murmur of her reply.

We had, indeed, recognised each other in that brief meeting of our eyes. Some kind of challenge had passed between us. I had dared her to drop that disguise of trickery and show herself as she was; and her response had been an admission that she acknowledged not me, but my recognition of her.

How far the fact that I had truly appraised her real worth might influence her, in time, to think gently of me, I could not guess; but I hoped, even a little vaingloriously, that she would respond to our mutual appreciation of truth. I had shown her, I believed, how greatly I admired the spirit she had been at such pains to conceal during that talk in the honest sitting-room of the Home Farm. And I felt that her failure to resent the impertinence of my 'No doubt, you're used to that,' had been due to an understanding of something she and I had in common against the whole solid, stolid, aristocratic family of Jervaise.

Moreover, she gave me what I counted as two more causes for hopefulness before we left the house. The first was her repetition, given, now, with a more vibrating sincerity, of the belief that we should find Brenda safely at home when we got back to the Hall.

'I feel sure you will, Mr Jervaise,' she said, and the slight pucker of anxiety between her eyebrows was an earnest that even if her belief was a little tremulous, her hope, at least, was unquestionably genuine.

The second sign was the acceptance of a hackneyed commonplace; the proffer of a friendly message through the medium of a cliché which, however false in its general application, offered a short cut to the interpretation of feeling. Racquet, who had maintained a well-bred silence from the first moment of his mistress's reproof, had honoured me with his approval while we sat in the farmhouse sitting-room, and sealed the agreement by a friendly thrust of his nose as we said 'Good-night.'

Anne did not look at me as she spoke, but her soft comment, 'You are fond of dogs,' seemed to me a full acknowledgment of our recognition of each other's quality.

I must admit, however, that at two o'clock in the morning one's sense of values is not altogether normal.

III

FRANK JERVAISE

I SHOULD have preferred to maintain a thoughtful, experiencing silence throughout our walk home. I had plenty of material for reflection. I wanted, now, to look at all this disappearing Brenda business from a new angle. I had a sense of the weaving of plots, and of the texture of them; such a sense as I imagine a blind man may get through sensitive finger-tips. Two new characters had come into my play, and I knew them both for principals. That opening act without Brenda, Arthur Banks, or his sister was nothing more than a prologue. The whole affair had begun again to fascinate my interest. Moreover, I was becoming aware of a stern, half-tragic background that had not yet come into proper focus.

And the circumstances of our walk home were of a kind that I find peculiarly stimulating to the imagination. The sky was clearing. Above us, widening pools of deep sky, glinting here and there, with the weak radiance of half-drowned stars, opened and closed again behind dispersing wreaths of mist. While in the west, a heaped indigo gloom that might in that light have been mistaken for

the silhouette of a vast impending forest, revealed at one edge a thin haze of yellow silver that stretched weak exploring arms of light towards the mysterious obscurity of the upper clouds. I knew precisely how that sky would look at sunset, but at moonset it had a completely different quality that was at once more ethereal and more primitive. It seemed to me that this night-sky had the original, eternal effect of all planetary space; that it might be found under the leaping rings of Saturn or in the perpetual gloom of banished Neptune. Compared to the comprehensible, reproducible effects of sunlight, it was as the wonder of the ineffable to the beauty of a magnificent picture.

But I was not left for many minutes to the rapture of contemplation. Even the primitive had to give place to the movement of our tiny, civilised drama. Jervaise and I were of the race that has been steadily creating a fiction of the earth since the first appearance of inductive science in the days of prehistoric man; and we could not live for long outside the artificial realism of the thing that we were making. We were not the creatures of a process, but little gods in a world-pantheon.

I made no attempt to check him when he began to talk. I knew by the raised tone of his voice—he was speaking quite a third above his ordinary pitch—that he was pleasantly excited by our

interview with Anne: an excitement that he now wished either to conceal, or, if that were impossible, to attribute to another cause.

'It occurs to me that there are one or two very puzzling points about that visit of ours, Melhuish,' he began.

'At least two,' I agreed.

'Which are?' he asked.

'I'd prefer to hear yours first,' I said, having no intention of displaying my own.

He was so eager to exhibit his cleverness that he did not press me for my probably worthless deductions.

'Well, in the first place,' he said, 'did it strike you as a curious fact that Miss Banks, and she alone, was apparently disturbed by that dog's infernal barking?'

'It hadn't struck me,' I admitted; and just because I had not remarked that anomaly for myself, I was instantly prepared to treat it as unworthy of notice. 'I suppose her father and mother and the servants, and so on, heard her let us in,' I said.

Jervaise jeered at that. 'Oh! my good man,' he said.

'Well, why not?' I returned peevishly.

'I put it to you,' he said, 'whether in those circumstances the family's refusal to make an appearance admits of any ordinary explanation?'

I could see, now, that it did not; but having

committed myself to a point of view, I determined to uphold it. 'Why *should* they come down?' I asked.

'Common curiosity would be a sufficient inducement, I should imagine,' Jervaise replied with a snort of contempt, 'to say nothing of a reasonable anxiety to know why any one should call at two o'clock in the morning. It isn't usual, you know—outside the theatrical world, perhaps.'

I chose to ignore the sneer conveyed by his last sentence.

'They may be very heavy sleepers,' I tried, fully aware of the inanity of my suggestion.

Jervaise laughed unpleasantly, a nasty hoot of derision. 'Don't be a damned fool,' he said. 'The human being isn't born who could sleep through that hullabaloo.'

I relinquished that argument as hopeless, and having no other at the moment, essayed a weak reprisal. 'Well, what's your explanation?' I asked in the tone of one ready to discount any possible explanation he might have to make.

'It's obvious,' he returned. 'There can be only one. They were expecting us.'

'Do you mean that Miss Banks was deliberately lying to us all the time?' I challenged him with some heat.

'Why that?' he asked.

'Well, if she were expecting us . . .'

'Which she never denied.'

'And had warned all her people . .

'As she had a perfect right to do.'

'It makes her out a liar, in effect,' I protested. 'I mean, she implied, if she didn't actually state, that she knew nothing whatever of your sister's movements.'

'Which may have been true,' he remarked in the complacent tone of one who waits to formulate an unimpeachable theory.

'Good Lord! How?' I asked.

'Brenda may have been expected and not have arrived,' he explained, condescending, at last, to point out all the obvious inferences I had missed. 'In which case, my friend, Miss Banks's *suppressio veri* was, in my judgment, quite venial. Indeed, she was, if the facts are as I suppose, perfectly honest in her surprise. Let us assume that she had arranged to let Brenda in, at say twelve-thirty, and having her father and mother under her thumb, had warned them to take no notice if Racquet started his cursed shindy in the middle of the night. The servant may have been told that Mr Arthur might be coming. You will notice, also, that Miss Banks had not, at one-thirty, gone to bed, although we may infer that she had undressed. Furthermore, it is a fair assumption that she saw us coming, and having, by then, given up, it may be, any hope of seeing Brenda, she was, no doubt, considerably at a loss to account for our presence. Now, does that or does it not cover the facts, and

does it acquit Miss Banks of the charge of perjury?’

I was forced, something reluctantly, to concede an element of probability in his inferences, although his argument following the legal tradition was based on a kind of average law of human motive and took no account of personal peculiarities. He did not try to consider what Anne would do in certain circumstances, but what would be done by that vaguely-conceived hermaphrodite who figures in the Law Courts and elsewhere as ‘Anyone.’ I could hear Jervaise saying, ‘I ask you, gentlemen, what would you have done, what would Anyone have done in such a case as this?’

‘Hm!’ I commented, and added, ‘It still makes Miss Banks appear rather—double-faced.’

‘Can’t see it,’ Jervaise replied. ‘Put yourself in her place and see how it works!’

‘Oh! Lord!’ I murmured, struck by the grotesque idea of Jervaise attempting to see life through the eyes of Anne. Imagine a rhinoceros thinking itself into the experiences of a skylark!

Jervaise bored ahead, taking no notice of my interruption. ‘Assuming for the moment the general probability of my theory,’ he said, ‘mayn’t we hazard the further assumption that Brenda was going to the farm in the first instance to meet Banks? His sister, we will suppose, being willing to sanction such a more or less chaperoned assignation. Then, when the pair didn’t turn up, she guesses that the meeting is off for some reason or

another, but obviously her friendship for Brenda—to say nothing of loyalty to her brother—would make her conceal the fact of the proposed assignation from us. Would you call that being “double-faced”? I shouldn’t.’

‘Oh! yes; it’s all very reasonable,’ I agreed petulantly. ‘But how does it affect the immediate situation? Do you, for instance, expect to find your sister at home when we get back?’

‘I do,’ assented Jervaise definitely. ‘I believe that Miss Banks had some good reason for being so sure that we should find her there.’

I am not really pig-headed. I may not give way gracefully to such an opponent as Jervaise, but I do not stupidly persist in a personal opinion through sheer obstinacy. And up to Jervaise’s last statement, his general deductions were, I admitted to myself, not only within the bounds of probability but, also, within distance of affording a tolerable explanation of Anne’s diplomacy during our interview. But—and I secretly congratulated myself on having exercised a subtler intuition in this one particular, at least—I did not believe that Anne expected us to find Brenda at the Hall on our return. I remembered that anxious pucker of the brow and the pathetic insistence on the belief—or might it not better be described as a hope?—that Brenda had done nothing final.

‘You haven’t made a bad case,’ I conceded; ‘but I differ as to your last inference.’

'You don't think we shall find Brenda at home?'

'I do not,' I replied aggressively.

I expected him to bear me down under a new weight of argument founded on the psychology of Anyone, and I was startled when he suddenly dropped the lawyer and let out a whole-hearted 'Damnation,' that had a ring of fine sincerity.

I changed my tone instantly in response to that agreeably human note.

'I may be quite mistaken, of course,' I said. 'I hope to goodness I am. By the way, do you know if she has taken any luggage with her?'

'Can't be sure,' Jervaise said. 'Olive's been looking and there doesn't seem to be anything missing, but we've no idea what things she brought down from town with her. If she'd been making plans beforehand . . .'

We came out of the wood at that point in our discussion, and almost at the same moment the last barrier of cloud slipped away from before the moon. She was in her second quarter, and seemed to be indolently rolling down towards the horizon, the whole pose of the scene giving her the effect of being half-recumbent.

I turned and looked at Jervaise and found him facing me with the full light of the moon on his face. He was frowning, not with the domineering scowl of the cross-examining counsel, but with a perplexed, inquiring frown that revealed all the boy in him.

Once at Oakstone he had got into a serious scrape that had begun in bravado and ended by a public thrashing. He had poached a trout from the waters of a neighbouring landowner, who had welcomed the opportunity to make himself more than usually objectionable. And on the morning before his thrashing, Jervaise had come into my study and confessed to me that he was dreading the coming ordeal. He was not afraid of the physical pain, he told me, but of the shame of the thing. We were near to becoming friends that morning. He confessed to no one but me. But when the affair was over—he bore himself very well—he resumed his usual airs of superiority, and snubbed me when I attempted to sympathise with him.

And I saw, now, just the same boyish dread and perplexity that I had seen when he made his confession to me at Oakstone. He looked to me, indeed, absurdly unchanged by the sixteen years that had separated the two experiences.

‘You know, Melhuish,’ he said; ‘I’m not altogether blaming Brenda in one way.’

‘Do you think she’s really in love with Banks?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘How can any one know? But it has been going on a long time—weeks, anyhow. They were all getting nervous about it at home. The mater told me when I came down this afternoon. She wanted me to talk to B. about it. I was going to. She doesn’t take any

•

notice of Olive. Never has.' He stopped and looked at me with an appeal in his face that begged contradiction.

We were standing still in the moonlight at the edge of the wood and the accident of our position made me wonder if Jervaise's soul also hesitated between some gloomy prison of conventional success and the freedom of beautiful desires. I could find no words, however, to press that speculation and instead I attempted, rather nervously, to point the way towards what I regarded as the natural solution of the immediate problem. 'Come,' I said, 'the idea of a marriage between Banks and your sister doesn't appear so unreasonable. The Bankses are evidently good old yeoman stock on the father's side. It is a mere accident of luck that you should be the owners of the land and not they.'

'Theoretically, yes!' he said with a hint of impatience. 'But we've got to consider the opinions—prejudices, if you like—of all my people—to say nothing of the neighbours.'

'Oh! put the neighbours first,' I exclaimed. 'It's what we think other people will think that counts with most of us.'

'It isn't,' Jervaise returned gloomily. 'You don't understand what the idea of family means to people like my father and mother. They've been brought up in it. It has more influence with them than religion. They'd prefer any scandal to a *mésalliance*.'

'In your sister's case?' I put in, a trifle shocked by the idea of the scandal, and then discovered that he had not been thinking of Brenda.

'Perhaps not in that case,' he said, 'but . . . ' he paused noticeably before adding, 'the principle remains the same.'

'Isn't it chiefly a matter of courage?' I asked. 'It isn't as if . . . the *mésalliance* were in any way disgraceful.'

I can't absolve myself from the charge of hypocrisy in the making of that speech. I was thinking of Jervaise and Anne, and I did not for one moment believe that Anne would ever marry him. My purpose was, I think, well-intentioned. I honestly believed that it would be good for him to fall in love with Anne and challenge the world of his people's opinion for her sake. But I blame myself, now, for a quite detestable lack of sincerity in pushing him on. I should not have done it if I had thought he had a real chance with her. Life is very difficult; especially for the well-intentioned.

Jervaise shrugged his shoulders. 'It's all so infernally complicated by this affair of Brenda's,' he said.

Yet it had seemed simple enough to him, I reflected, an hour before. 'Kick *him* and bring *her* home,' had been his ready solution of the difficulties he thought were before us. Evidently Anne's behaviour during our talk at the farm had had a considerable effect upon his opinions. That,

and the moon. I feel strongly inclined to include the moon—lazily declining now towards the ambush of a tumulus-shaped hill, crowned, as is the manner of that country, with a pert little top-knot of trees.

‘Complicated or simplified?’ I suggested.

‘Complicated; damnably complicated,’ he replied irritably. ‘Brenda’s a little fool. It isn’t as if she were in earnest.’

‘Then you don’t honestly believe that she’s in love with Banks?’ I asked, remembering his ‘I don’t know. How can any one know,’ of a few minutes earlier.

‘She’s so utterly unreliable—in every way,’ he equivocated. ‘She always has been. She isn’t the least like the rest of us.’

‘Don’t you count yourself as another exception?’ I asked.

‘Not in that way, Brenda’s way,’ he said. ‘She’s scatter-brained; you can’t get round that. Going off after the dance in that idiotic way. It’s maddening.’

‘Well, there are two questions that must be resolved before we can get any further,’ I commented. ‘The first is whether your sister has gone back—she may have been safe in bed for the last hour and a half for all we know. And the second is whether she is honestly in love with Banks. From what I’ve heard of him, I should think it’s very likely,’ I added thoughtfully.

Jervaise had his hands in his pockets and was

staring up at the moon. 'He's not a bad chap in some ways,' he remarked, 'but there's no getting over the fact that he's our chauffeur.'

I saw that. No badge could be quite so disgraceful in the eyes of the Jervaises as the badge of servitude. Our talk there, by the wood, had begun to create around us all the limitations of man's world. I was forgetting that we were moving in the free spaces of a planetary republic. And then I looked up and saw the leaning moon, whimsically balanced on the very crown of the top-knot that gave a touch of impudence to the pudding-basin hill.

'What's the name of that hill?' I asked.

He looked at it absently for a moment before he said, 'The people about here call it "Jervaise Clump." It's a landmark for miles.'

There was no getting away from it. The Jervaises had conquered all this land and labelled it. I watched the sharp edge of the tree-clump slowly indenting the rounded back of the moon; and it seemed to me that Jervaise Clump was the solid permanent thing; the moon a mere incident of the night.

'Oh! Lord! Lord! What bosh it all is!' I exclaimed.

'All what?' Jervaise asked sharply.

'This business of distinctions; of masters and servants; of families in possession and families in dependence,' I enunciated.

'It isn't such dangerous bosh as socialism,' Jervaise replied.

'I wasn't thinking of socialism,' I said; 'I was thinking of interplanetary space.'

Jervaise blew contemptuously. 'Don't talk rot,' he said, and I realised that we were back again on the old footing of our normal relations. Nevertheless I made one more effort.

'It isn't rot,' I said. 'If it is, then every impulse towards beauty and freedom is rot, too.' (I could not have said that to Jervaise in a house, but I drew confidence from the last tip of the moon beckoning farewell above the curve of the hill.) 'Your, whatever it is you feel for Miss Banks—things like that . . . all our little efforts to get away from these awful, clogging human rules.'

I had given him his opportunity and he took it. He was absolutely ruthless. 'No one but a fool tries to be superhuman,' he said. 'Come on!'

He had turned and was walking back in the direction of the Hall, and I followed him, humiliated and angry.

It was so impossible for me at that moment to avoid the suspicion that he had led me on by his appealing confidences solely in order to score off me when I responded. It is not, indeed, surprising that that should be my reaction while the hurt of his sneer still smarted. For he had pricked me on a tender spot. I realised the weakness of what I had said; and it was a characteristic weakness.

I had been absurdly unpractical, as usual, aiming like a fool, as Jervaise had said, at some 'super-human' ideal of freedom that perhaps existed solely in my own imagination; and would certainly be regarded by Mr and Mrs Jervaise and their circle of county friends as the vapourings of a weak mind. In short, Jervaise had made me aware of my own ineptitude, and it took me a full ten minutes before I could feel anything but resentment.

We had passed back through the kitchen garden with its gouty espaliers, and come into the pleasance before I forgave him. According to his habit, he made no apology for his rudeness, but his explicit renewal of confidence in me more nearly approached an overt expression of desire for my friendship than anything I had ever known him to show hitherto.

'Look here, Melhuish,' he said, stopping suddenly in the darkness of the garden. I could not 'look' with much effect, but I replied, a trifle sulkily, 'Well? What?'

'If she hasn't come back . . . ' he said.

'I don't see that we can do anything more till to-morrow,' I replied.

'No use trying to find her, of course,' he agreed, irritably, 'but we'd better talk things over with the governor.'

'If I can be of any help . . . ' I remarked elliptically.

'You won't be if you start that transcendental

rot,' he returned, as if he already regretted his condescension.

'What sort of rot do you want me to talk?' I asked.

'Common sense,' he said.

I resisted the desire to say that I was glad he acknowledged the Jervaise version of common sense to be one kind of rot.

'All serene,' I agreed.

He did not thank me.

And when I looked back on the happenings of the two hours that had elapsed since Jervaise had fetched me out of the improvised buffet, I was still greatly puzzled to account for his marked choice of me as a confidant. It was a choice that seemed to signify some weakness in him. I wondered if he had been afraid to trust himself alone with Anne at the Farm; if he were now suffering some kind of trepidation at the thought of the coming interview with his father? I found it so impossible to associate any idea of weakness with that bullying mask which was the outward expression of Frank Jervaise.

IV

IN THE HALL

WE found the family awaiting us in the Hall—Mr and Mrs Jervaise, Olive, and 'Ronnie' Turnbull, whose desire to become one of the family by marrying its younger daughter was recognised and approved by every one except the young lady herself. Ronnie had evidently been received into the fullest confidence.

We had come in by the back door and made our way through the rather arid cleanliness of the house's administrative departments, flavoured with a smell that combined more notably the odours of cooking and plate-polish. The transition as we emerged through the red baize door under the majestic panoply of the staircase, was quite startling. It was like passing from the desolate sanitation of a well-kept workhouse straight into the lighted auditorium of a theatre. That contrast dramatised, for me, the Jervaises' tremendous ideal of the barrier between owner and servant; but it had, also, another effect which may have been due to the fact that it was, now, three o'clock in the morning.

For just at the moment of our transition I had

the queerest sense not only of having passed at some previous time through a precisely similar experience, but, also, of taking part in a ridiculous dream. At that instant Jervaise Hall, its owners, dependants and friends, had the air of being not realities but symbols pushed up into my thought by some prank of the fantastic psyche who dwells in the subconscious. I should not have been surprised at any incongruity in the brief passing of that illusion.

The sensation flashed up and vanished; but it left me with the excited feeling of one who has had a vision of something transcendental, something more vivid and real than the common experiences of life—just such a feeling as I have had about some perfectly absurd dream of the night.

Mr Jervaise was a man of nearly sixty, I suppose, with a clean-shaven face, a longish nose, and rather loose cheeks which fell, nevertheless, into firm folds and gave him a look of weak determination. I should have liked to model his face in clay; his lines were of the kind that give the amateur a splendid chance in modelling.

Mrs Jervaise was taller and thinner than her husband, but lost something by always carrying her head with a slight droop as if she were for ever passing through a low doorway. Her features were sharper than his—she had a high hawk nose and a thin line of a mouth—but either they were

carelessly arranged or their relative proportions were bad, for I never felt the least desire to model her. Jervaise's face came out as a presentable whole, my memory of his wife delivers the hawk nose as the one salient object of what is otherwise a mere jumble.

Old Jervaise certainly looked the more aristocratic of the pair, but Mrs Jervaise was a woman of good family. She had been a Miss Norman before her marriage—one of the Shropshire Normans.

The four people in the Hall looked as if they had reached the stage of being dreadfully bored with each other when we arrived. They did not hear us immediately, and as my momentary dream dissolved I had an impression of them all as being on the verge of a heartrending yawn. They perked up instantly, however, when they saw us, turning towards us with a movement that looked concerted and was in itself a question.

Frank Jervaise, striding on ahead of me, answered at once, with a gloomy shake of his head.

'Isn't she there?' his mother asked. And 'Hasn't she been there at all?' she persisted when Frank returned a morose negative.

'Who did you see?' put in young Turnbull.

'Miss Banks,' Frank said.

'You are quite sure that Brenda hadn't been there?' Olive Jervaise added by way of rounding up and completing the inquiry.

It was then Frank's turn to begin an unnecessary interrogation by saying 'She isn't here, then?' He must have known that she was not, by their solicitude; but if he had not put that superfluous question, I believe I should; though I might not have added as he did, 'You're absolutely certain?'

Young Turnbull then exploded that phase of the situation by remarking, 'I suppose you know that the car's gone?'

Frank was manifestly shocked by that news.

'Good Lord! no, I didn't. How do you know?' he said.

'I left my own car in the ditch, just outside the Park,' Ronnie explained. 'Don't know in the least how it happened. Suppose I was thinking of something else. Anyway, I've fairly piled her up, I'm afraid. I was coming back from the vicarage, you know. And then, of course, I walked up here, and Mr Jervaise was good enough to offer me your car to get home in; and when we went out to the garage, it had gone.'

'But was it there when you went to get your own car?' Frank asked.

'I'm bothered if I know,' Ronnie confessed. 'I've been trying hard to remember.'

Mr Jervaise sighed heavily and took a little stroll across to the other side of the Hall. He seemed to me to be more perturbed and unhappy than any of the others.

Frank stood in a good central position and

scowled enormously, while his mother, his sister, and Ronnie waited anxiously for the important decision that he was apparently about to deliver. And they still looked to him to find some expedient when his impending judgment had taken form in the obvious pronouncement, 'Looks as if they'd gone off together, somewhere.'

'It's very dreadful,' Mrs Jervaise said; and then Olive slightly lifted the awful flatness of the dialogue by saying,—

'We ought to have guessed. It's absurd that we let the thing go on.'

'One couldn't be sure,' her mother protested.

'If you're going to wait till you're sure, of course . . . ' Frank remarked brutally, with a shrug of his eyebrows that effectively completed his sentence.

'It was so impossible to believe that she would do a thing like that,' his mother complained.

'Point is, what's to be done now,' Ronnie said. 'By gad, if I catch that chap, I'll wring his neck.'

Mr Jervaise, who was taking a lonely promenade up and down the far side of the Hall, looked up more hopefully at this threat.

'Oh! we can *catch* him,' Frank commented. 'He has stolen the car, for one thing . . . ' his inflection implied that catching Banks might be only the beginning of the trouble.

'Well, once we've got him,' returned Ronnie hopefully.

'Don't be an ass,' Frank snubbed him. 'We can't advertise it all over the county that he has gone off with Brenda.'

'I don't see . . .' Ronnie began, but Mrs Jervaise interrupted him.

'It was so unfortunate that the Atkinsons should have been here,' she remarked.

'Every one will know, in any case,' Olive added.

Those avowals of their real and altogether desperate cause for distress raised the emotional tone of the two Jervaise women, and for the first time since I had come into the Hall, they looked at me with a hint of suspicion. They made me feel that I was an outsider, who might very well take this opportunity to withdraw.

I was on the point of accepting the hint when Frank Jervaise dragged me into the conclave.

'What do you think, Melhuish?' he asked, and then they all turned to me as if I might be able in some miraculous way to save the situation. Even old Jervaise paused in his melancholy pacing and waited for my answer.

'There is so little real evidence, at present,' I said, feeling their need for some loophole and searching my mind to discover one for them.

'It really does seem almost impossible that Brenda should have—run away with that man,' Mrs Jervaise pleaded with the beginning of a gesture that produced the effect of wanting to wring her hands.

'She's under age, too,' Frank put in.

'Does that mean they can't get married?' asked Ronnie.

'Not legally,' Frank said.

'It's such madness, such utter madness,' his mother broke out in a tone between lament and denunciation. But she pulled herself up immediately and came back to my recent contribution as presenting the one possible straw that still floated in this drowning world. 'But, as Mr Melhuish says,' she went on with a little gasp of annoyance, 'we really have very little evidence, as yet.'

'It has occurred to me to wonder,' I tried, 'whether Miss Jervaise might not have been moved by a sudden desire to drive the car by moonlight . . .' I was going on to defend my suggestion by pleading that such an impulse would, so far as I could judge, be quite in character, but no further argument was needed. I had created a sensation. My feeble straw had suddenly taken the form of a practicable seaworthy raft, big enough to accommodate all the family—with the one exception of Frank, who, as it were, grasped the edge of this life-saving apparatus of mine, and tested it suspiciously. His preliminary and perfectly futile opening to the effect that the moon had already set, was, however, smothered in the general acclamation.

'Oh! of course! So she may!' Mrs Jervaise exclaimed.

'Well, we might have thought of that, certainly,' Olive echoed. 'It would be so *like* Brenda.'

While Ronnie hopefully murmured 'That is possible, quite possible,' as a kind of running accompaniment.

Then Mr Jervaise began to draw in to the family group, with what seemed to me quite an absurd air of meaning to find a place on the raft of the big rug by the fireplace. Indeed, they had all moved a little closer together. Only Frank maintained his depressing air of doubt.

'Been an infernally long time,' he said. 'What's it now? Half-past three?'

'She may have had an accident,' Olive suggested cheerfully.

'Or gone a lot farther than she originally meant to,' Ronnie substituted; the suggestion of an accident to Brenda obviously appearing less desirable to him than it apparently did to Brenda's sister.

'It seems to me,' Mr Jervaise said, taking the lead for the first time, 'that there may very well be half a dozen reasons for her not having returned; but I can't think of one that provides the semblance of an excuse for her going in the first instance. Brenda must be—severely reprimanded. It's intolerable that she should be allowed to go on like this.'

'She has always been spoilt,' Olive said in what I thought was a slightly vindictive aside.

'She's so impossibly headstrong,' deplored Mrs Jervaise.

Her husband shook his head impatiently. 'There is a limit to this kind of thing,' he said. 'She must be made to understand—I will make her understand that we draw the line at midnight adventures of this kind.'

Mrs Jervaise and Olive agreed warmly with that decision, and the three of them drew a little apart, discussing, I inferred, the means that were to be adopted for the limiting of the runaway, when she returned. But I was puzzled to know whether they were finally convinced of the truth of the theory they had so readily adopted. Were they deceiving, or trying very hard, indeed, to deceive themselves into the belief that the whole affair was nothing but a prank of Brenda's? I saw that my casual suggestion had a general air of likelihood, but if I had been in their place, I should have demanded evidence before I drew much consolation from so unsupported a conclusion.

I joined young Turnbull.

'Good idea of yours, Melhuish,' Ronnie said.

Frank grunted.

'I've no sort of grounds for it, you know,' I explained. 'It was only a casual suggestion.'

'Jolly convincing one, though,' Turnbull congratulated me. 'So exactly the sort of thing she would do, isn't it, Frank?'

'Shouldn't have thought she'd have been gone

so long,' Jervaise replied. He looked at me as he continued, 'And how does it fit with that notion of ours about Miss Banks having expected her?'

'That was only a guess,' I argued.

'Better evidence for it than you had for your guess,' he returned, and we drifted into an indeterminate wrangle, each of us defending his own theory rather because he had had the glory of originating it than because either of us had, I think, the least faith in our explanations.

It was Ronnie who, picking up the thread of our deductions from the Home Farm interview in the course of our discussion, sought to reconcile us and our theories.

'She might have meant to go up to the Farm,' he suggested, 'and changed her mind when she got outside. Nothing very unlikely in that.'

'But why the devil should she have made an appointment at the Home Farm in the first instance?' Frank replied with some cogency.

'If she ever did,' I put in unwisely, thereby provoking a repetition of the evidence afforded by Miss Banks's behaviour, particularly the damning fact that she, alone, had responded to Racquet's demand for our instant annihilation.

And while we went on with our pointless arguments and the other little group of three continued to lay plans for the re-education of Brenda, the depression of a deeper and deeper ennui weighed upon us all. The truth is, I think, that we were

all waiting for the possibility of the runaway's return, listening for the sound of the car, and growing momentarily more uneasy as no sound came. No doubt the Jervaises were all very sleepy and peevish, and the necessity of restraining themselves before Turnbull and myself added still another to their many sources of irritation.

I put the Jervaises apart in this connection, because Ronnie was certainly very wide awake and I had no inclination whatever to sleep. My one longing was to get back, alone, into the night. I was fretting with the fear that the dawn would have broken before I could get away. I had made up my mind to watch the sunrise from 'Jervaise clump.'

It was Mrs Jervaise who started the break-up of the party. She was attacked by a craving to yawn that gradually became irresistible. I saw the incipient symptoms of the attack and watched her with a sympathetic fascination, as she clenched her jaw, put her hand up to her lips, and made little impatient movements of her head and body. I knew that it must come at last, and it did, catching her unawares in the middle of a sentence—undertaken, I fancy, solely as a defence against the insidious craving that was obsessing her.

'Oh, dear!' she said, with a mincing, apologetic gesture of her head; and then 'Dear me!' Having committed the solecism, she found it necessary to draw attention to it. She may have been a Shrop-

shire Norman, but at that relaxed hour of the night, she displayed all the signs of the orthodox genteel attitude.

'I don't know when I've been so tired,' she apologised.

But, indeed, she did owe us an apology for her yawning fit affected us all like a virulent epidemic. In a moment we were every one of us trying to stifle the same desire, and each in our own way being overcome. I must do Frank the justice to say that he, at least, displayed no sign of gentility.

'Oh! Lord, mater, you've started us now,' he said, and gave way almost sensuously to his impulses, stretching and gaping in a way that positively racked us with the longing to imitate him.

'Really, my dear, no necessity for you,' began Mr Jervaise, yawned more or less politely behind a very white, well-kept hand, and concluded, 'no necessity for you or Olive to stay up; none whatever. We cannot, in any case, *do* anything until the morning.'

'Even if she comes in, now,' supplemented Olive.

'As I'm almost sure she will,' affirmed Mrs Jervaise.

And she must have put something of genuine confidence into her statement, for automatically we all stopped talking for a few seconds and listened again with the ears of faith for the return of the car.

'But as I said,' Olive began again, abruptly ending the unhopeful suspense of our pause, 'there's nothing more we can do by sitting up. And there's certainly no need for you to overtire yourself, mother.'

'No, really not,' urged Ronnie politely, 'nor for you, either, sir,' he added, addressing his host. 'What I mean is, Frank and I'll do all that.'

'Rather, let's get a drink,' Frank agreed.

We wanted passionately to get away from each other and indulge ourselves privately in a very orgie of gapes and stretchings. And yet, we stuck there, idiotically, making excuses and little polite recommendations for the others to retire, until Frank, with a drastic quality of determination that he sometimes showed, took command.

'Go on, mater,' he said; 'you go to bed.' And he went up to her, kissed her in the mechanical way of most grown-up sons, and gently urged her in the direction of the stairs. She submitted, still with faint protestations of apology.

Olive followed, and with a last feint of hospitality, her father brought up the tail of the procession.

'Coming for a drink?' Frank asked me with a jerk of his head towards the extemporised buffet.

'Well, no, thanks. I think not,' I said, seeking the relief afforded by the women's absence; although, now, that I could indulge my desire without restraint, the longing to gape had surprisingly vanished.

'Going to bed?' Jervaise suggested.

'Yes. Bed's the best place, just now,' I lied.

'Right oh ! Good-night, old chap,' Ronnie said effusively.

I pretended to be going upstairs and they did not wait for me to disappear. As soon as they had left the Hall, I sneaked down again, recovered from the cloak-room the light overcoat I had worn on our expedition to the Farm—I have no idea to whom that overcoat belonged—borrowed a cap, and let myself out stealthily by the front door.

As I quietly shut the door behind me, a delicious whiff of night-stock drifted by me, as if it had waited there for all those long hours seeking entrance to the stale, dry air of the Hall.

And it must have been, I think, that scent of night-stock which gave me the sense of a completed episode, or first act, as I stood alone, at last, on the gravel sweep before the Hall. Already the darkness was lifting. The dawn was coming high up in the sky, a sign of fair weather.

I have always had a sure sense of direction, and I turned instinctively towards the landmark of my promised destination, although it was invisible from that side of the Hall—screened by the avenue of tall forest trees, chiefly elms, that led up from the principal entrance to the Park. I had noticed one side road leading into this avenue as I had driven up from the station the previous afternoon, and I sought that turning now, with a feeling of certainty that it would take me in the right direction.

As, indeed, it did; for it actually skirted the base of 'Jervaise Clump,' which touched the extreme edge of the Park on that side.

As I cautiously felt my way down the avenue—it was still black dark under the dark trees—and later up the tunnel of the side road which I hit upon by an instinct that made me feel for it at the precise moment when I reached the point of its junction with the avenue—I returned with a sense of satisfaction to the memory of the last four hours. I was conscious of some kind of plan in the way the comedy of Brenda's disappearance had been put before us. I realised that, as an art form, the plan was essentially undramatic, but the thought of it gave me, nevertheless, a distinct feeling of pleasure.

I saw the experience as a prelude to this lonely adventure of mine—a prelude full of movement and contrast; but I had no premonition of any equally diverting sequel.

The daylight was coming, and I believed, a trifle regretfully, that that great solvent of all mysteries would display these emotions of the night as the phantasmagoria of our imagination.

Before I had reached the end of the tunnel through the wood and had come out into the open whence I could, now, see the loom of Jervaise Clump swelling up before me in the deep, gray gloom of early dawn, I had decided that my suggestion had been prompted by an intuition of truth. Brenda had fallen under the spell of the moon, and

gone for a long drive in the motor. She had taken Banks with her, obviously; but that action need not be presumed to have any romantic significance. And the Jervaises had accepted that solution. They had been more convinced of its truth than I had imagined. They would never have gone to bed, tired as they were, if they had not been satisfied that Brenda had committed no other indiscretion than that of indulging herself in the freak of a moonlight drive. It had, certainly, been unduly prolonged; but, as old Jervaise had said, there might be half a dozen reasons to account for that.

As I turned off the road and breasted the lower slopes of the hill, I was constructing the details of the Jervaises' explanatory visit to the Atkinsons. I had reached the point of making Mrs Jervaise repeat the statement she had made in the Hall that 'dear Brenda was so impossibly headstrong,' when I heard the sweet, true notes of some one ahead of me, whistling, almost miraculously, in tune.

It isn't one man in a million who can whistle absolutely true.

V

DAYBREAK

HE was whistling Schubert's setting of 'Who is Sylvia?' and as I climbed slowly and as silently as I could towards him, I fitted the music to the words of the second verse :—

Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness.

Only a man in love, I thought, could be whistling that air with such attention and accuracy. He hit that unusual interval—is it an augmented seventh?—with a delicacy that was quite thrilling.

He had the world to himself, as yet. The birds of the morning had not begun their orisons, while the birds of the night, the owls and the corncrakes had, happily, retired before the promise of that weakening darkness which seemed nevertheless to have reached a moment of suspense—indeed, I fancied that it was darker, now, than when I had come out of the Hall a quarter of an hour before.

The whistler had stopped before I reached the crest of the hill, and after trying vainly to locate

his whereabouts in the gloom, I leaned up against one of the outermost trunks of the perky little clump of trees, and facing East awaited developments. A thin, cold wind had sprung up, and was quietly stirring the leaves above me to an uneasy sibilance. I heard, now, too, an occasional sleepy twitter as if a few members of the orchestra had come into their places and were indolently testing the tune of their pipes. It came into my mind that the cold stir of air was the spirit of the dying night, fleeing westward before the sun. Also, I found myself wondering what would be the effect on us all if one morning we waited in vain for the sunrise? I tried to picture my own emotions as the truth was slowly borne in upon me that some unprecedented calamity had silently and without any premonition befallen the whole world of men. Would one crouch in a terror of apprehension? I could not see it that way. I believed that I should be trembling with a furious excitement, stirred to the very depths by so inspiring and adventurous a miracle. I had forsaken my speculation and was indulging in the philosophical reflection that a real and quite unaccountable miracle, the more universal the better, would be the most splendid justification of life I could possibly conceive, when the whistler began again, only a few yards away from me.

I could just see him now, sitting propped against the trunk of another tree, but I waited until he

had finished what I chose to believe was the third verse of his lyric before I hailed him. It came to me that I might test his quality by continuing the play in proper form, so when he paused, I went on with the speech of the 'host' which immediately follows the song in 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona.'

'How now?' I said. 'Are you sadder than you were before?'

He did not move, not even to turn his head towards me, and I inferred that he was aware of my presence before I spoke.

'You, one of the search party?' he asked.

I went over and sat down by him. I felt that the situation was sufficiently fantastic to permit of free speech. I did not know who he was and I did not care. I only knew that I wanted to deliver myself of the dreams my lack of sleep had robbed from me.

'The only one,' I said, 'unless you also belong to the very small and select party of searchers.'

I fancy that he turned his head a little towards me, but I kept my gaze fixed on the indigo masses of the obscure prospect before us.

'Who are you looking for?' he asked.

'Not so much who as what,' I said. 'And even then it isn't so easy to define. I've heard men call it beauty and mystery, and things like that; but just now it seemed to me that what I wanted most was a universal miracle—some really inexplicable happening that would upset every law

the physicists have ever stated. I was thinking, for instance, how thrilling it would be if the sun did not rise this morning. One would know, then, that all our scientific guesses at laws were just so many baby speculations founded on nothing more substantial than a few thousand years of experience which had, by some chance given always more or less the same results. Like a long run on the red, you know.'

'I know,' he said. 'Well? Go on.'

I was greatly stimulated by his encouragement. Here, at last, was the listener I had been waiting for all through the night.

'One gets so infernally sick of everything happening according to fixed rules,' I continued. 'And the more you learn the nearer you are to the deadly ability of being able to foretell the future. If we ever do reach that point in our intellectual evolution, I only hope that I shan't be there to see it. Imagine the awful ennui of a world where the expected always happened, and next year's happenings were always expected! And yet we go on seeking after knowledge, when we ought surely to avoid it, as the universal kill joy.'

'Hm!' commented my new friend on what I felt to be a note of doubtful agreement.

'You don't agree with that?' I asked.

'Well, I see what you're after, in a way,' he acknowledged; 'but it doesn't seem to me that it amounts to very much—practically.'

I was a trifle disappointed. I had not expected any insistence on the practical from a man who could whistle Schubert and Shakespeare to the dawn.

'Oh, practically! Perhaps not,' I replied with a hint of contempt for anything so common.

He gave a little self-conscious laugh. 'You can't get away from the practical in this life,' he said. 'Even in——' He seemed to bite off the beginning of confidence with an effort. 'You may dream half the night,' he began again, with a thin assumption of making an impersonal statement, 'but before the night's over you'll come up against the practical, or the practicable, or the proper right thing, or something, that makes you see what a fool you are. The way this world's run, you can't avoid it, anyhow.'

I knew that what he said was true, but I found it damping. It fitted all too well with the coming realism of day. The contours of the landscape were slowly resigning themselves to the formal attitudes imposed upon them by expectation. The blood of colour was beginning to run weakly through the monochrome. The nearer slopes of the hill and the leaves of the trees were already professing a resolute green. Moment by moment the familiar was taking prudent shape, preparing itself for the autocrat whose outriders were multitudinously busy about their warnings of his approach. Presently the scene would take on the natural beauty of our desire, but the actual process of

transformation rather depressed me that morning. I had been so deeply in love with the night.

I took up my companion's last sentence—spoken, I fancied, with a suggestion of brooding antagonism.

'You think the world might be 'run,' at least, more interestingly?' I put in.

'More sensibly,' he said in a voice that hinted a reserve of violence. 'There's no *sense* in it, the way we look at things. Only we don't look at 'em, most of us, not with any intelligence. We just take everything for granted because we happen to be used to it, that's all.'

'But would any form of socialism . . .' I tried tentatively.

'I don't know that I'm a socialist,' he returned. 'I don't belong to any union, or anything of that kind.' He stopped and looked at me with a defiant stare that was quite visible now. 'You know who I am, I suppose?' he challenged me.

'No idea,' I said.

'Banks, the chauffeur,' he said, as if he were giving himself up as a well-known criminal.

I was not entirely unprepared for that reply, but I had no tactful answer to make. I rejected the spontaneous impulse that arose, as I thought quite fantastically, to say 'I believe I have met your sister;' and fell back on an orthodox 'Well?' I tried to convey the effect that I still waited to be shocked.

'I suppose you're staying up at the Hall?' he said.

'For the week-end only,' I admitted.

'Been a pretty fuss there, I take it?' he said.

'Some,' I acknowledged.

He set his resolute-looking mouth and submitted me to cross-examination.

'Been looking for me?' he began.

'In a way. Frank Jervaise and I went up to your father's house.'

'What time?'

'Between two and three.'

'Not since?'

'No; we left about half-past two.'

'Is she back?'

'Who?' I asked. I was thinking of his sister, and could find no application for this question.

'Miss Jervaise.'

'Oh—er—Miss Brenda? No. She hadn't come in when I left the house.'

'What time was that?'

'About four. I came straight here.'

'Not back, eh?' he commented with a soft, low whistle, that mingled, I thought, something of gladness with its surprise.

'You don't know where she is, then?' I ventured.

He turned and looked at me suspiciously. 'I don't see why I should help *your* friends,' he said.

I realised that my position was a difficult one. My sympathies were entirely with Banks. I felt

that if there was to be any question of making allowances, I wanted to be on the side of Brenda and the Home Farm. But, at the same time, I could not deny that I owed something—loyalty, was it?—to the Jervaises. I pondered that for a few seconds before I spoke again, and by then I had found what I believed to be a tolerable attitude, though I was to learn later that it compromised me no less than if I had frankly thrown in my lot with the Banks faction.

‘You are quite right,’ I said. ‘And I would sooner you gave me no confidences, now I come to think of it. But I should like you to know, all the same, that I’m not taking sides in this affair. I have no intention, for instance, of telling them at the Hall that I’ve seen you.’

The daylight was flooding up from the North-West, now, in a great stream that had flushed the whole landscape with colour; and I could see the full significance of honest inquiry in my companion’s face as he probed me with his stare. But I could meet his gaze without confusion. My purpose was single enough, and if I had had a moment’s doubt of him when he failed to respond to my mood of fantasy; I was now fully prepared to accept him without qualification.

He was not like his sister in appearance. He favoured the paternal stock, I inferred. He was blue-eyed and fairer than Anne, and the tan of his face was red where hers was dusky. Nevertheless,

I saw a likeness between them deeper than some family trick of expression which, now and again, made me feel their kinship. For Banks, too, gave me the impression of having a soul that came something nearer the surface of life than is common in average humanity—a look of vitality, zest, ardour—I fumbled for a more significant superlative as I returned his stare. And yet behind that ardour there was, in Arthur Banks, at least, a hint of determination and shrewdness that I felt must be inherited from the sound yeoman stock of his father.

Our pause of mutual investigation ended in a smile. He held out his hand with a pleasant frankness that somehow proclaimed the added colonial quality of him.

‘That’s all right,’ he said, ‘but anyway I couldn’t give you any confidences, yet. I don’t know myself, you see.’

‘Are you going back to the Hall?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know that, either,’ he said, and added, ‘I shan’t go back as the chauffeur, anyway.’

And, indeed, there was little of the chauffeur in his appearance, just then. He was wearing a light tweed suit and brown brogues, and his clothes sat upon him with just that touch of familiarity, of negligence, that your professional servant’s mufti can never accomplish.

There was a new air of restlessness about him since he had put me under cross-examination.

He looked round him in the broadening day as if he were in search of something, or some one, hopefully yet half-despairingly expected.

'Look here—if you'd sooner I went . . . ' I began.

He had risen to his feet after his last statement and was looking back towards the Hall, but he faced me again when I spoke.

'Oh, no ! ' he said with a hint of weariness. 'It isn't likely that . . . ' He broke off and threw himself moodily down on the grass again before he continued, 'It's not that I couldn't trust you. But you can see for yourself that it's better I shouldn't. When you get back to the Hall, you might be asked questions and for your own sake it'd look better if you didn't know the answers.'

'Oh, quite,' I agreed, and added, 'I'll stay and see the sun rise.'

'You won't see the sun for some time,' he remarked. 'There'll be a lot of cloud and mist for it to break through. It's going to be a scorcher to-day.'

'Good,' I replied; and for a few minutes we discussed weather signs like any other conventional Englishmen. A natural comparison led us presently to the subject of Canada. But through it all he bore himself as a man with a preoccupation he could not forget; and I was looking for a good opening to make an excuse of fatigue and go back to the Hall, when something of the thought that

was intriguing him broke through the surface of his talk.

'I'm going back there as soon as I can,' he said with a sudden impatience. 'There's room to turn round in Canada without hitting up against a notice board and trespassing on the preserves of some landed proprietor. I'd never have come home if it hadn't been for the old people. They thought chauffering for Mr Jervaise would be a *chance* for me! Anyhow my father did. He's got the feeling of being dependent. It's in his bones like it is with all of 'em—on the estate. It's a tradition. Lord, the old man would be horrified, if he knew! The Jervaises are a sort of superior creation to him. We've been their tenants for God knows how many hundred years. And serfs before that, I suppose. I get the feeling myself, sometimes. It's infectious. When you see every one kow-towing to old Jervaise as if he were the angel Gabriel, you begin to feel as if there must be something in it.'

The full day had come, and the cold draught of air that had preceded the sunrise came now from behind me as if the spirits of the air had discovered that their panic-stricken flight had been a mistake and were tentatively returning to inquire into the new conditions. The birds were fully awake now, and there was a tremendous gossiping and chattering going on, that made me think of massed school-children in a railway station, twittering with the

excitement of their coming excursion. In the North-East the gray wall of mist was losing the hardness of its edge, and behind the cloud the sky was bleaching to an ever paler blue.

'And yet,' I said, as my companion paused, 'the Jervaises aren't anything particular as a family. They haven't done anything, even in the usual way, to earn ennoblement or fame.'

'They've squatted,' Banks said, 'that's what they've done. Set themselves down here in the reign of Henry II., and sat tight ever since—grabbing commons and so on, now and again, in the usual way, of course. The village is called after them, Thorp-Jervaise, and the woods and the hills, and half the labourers in the neighbourhood have got names like Jarvey and Jarvis. What I mean is that the Jervaises mayn't be of any account in London, or even in the county, alongside of families like Lord Garthorne's; but just round here they're the owners and always have been since there have been any private owners. Their word's law. If you don't like it, you can get out, and that's all there is about it.' He gazed thoughtfully in front of him and thrust out his lower lip. 'I've got to get out,' he added, 'unless . . .'

I hesitated to prompt him, fearing the possibly inquisitive sound of the most indirect question, and after what I felt was a very pregnant silence, he continued rather in the manner of one allusively submitting a case.

'But you get to a point where you feel as if no game's worth winning if you can't play it fair and open.'

'So long as the other side play fair with you,' I commented.

'They can afford to,' he returned. They get every bit of pull there is to have. I told you we've been tenants of the Home Farm ever since there's been a Home Farm, but old Jervaise could turn my father out any time, at six months' notice. Would, too. Probably have to, for the sake of public opinion. Well, would you call that playing fair?'

'I shouldn't,' I said with emphasis.

'Most people would,' he replied gloomily.

I was wondering what his own 'pull' might be, the pull he would not use because the use of it conflicted with his ideal of playing the game. I was inclined, with a foolish romanticism to toy with the notion of some old blood relationship between the families of Jervaise and Banks—some carefully hidden scandal that might even throw a doubt on the present owner's right of proprietorship. I was still rebuilding that foolish, familiar story of the lost heir, when my new friend put an end to further speculation by saying,—

'But what's the good of thinking about that—yet? Why, I don't even know . . .'

I could not resist a direct question this time. 'Don't even know what?' I asked.

'I was forgetting,' he said. He got to his feet again, looked round for a moment, and then gave a yawn which seemed to spring from a nervous rather than a muscular origin.

'No good my compromising you, just now,' he said with a friendly smile. 'You've probably guessed more, already, than'll be altogether convenient for you when you see the family at breakfast. Perhaps, we'll meet again some day.'

'I'm staying here till Monday,' I said.

'But I don't know if I am,' he replied with a whimsical twist of his firm mouth. 'Well, so long,' he went on quickly. 'Glad to have met you, anyway.' He nodded with a repetition of that frank, engaging smile of his, and turned away.

He did not take the road by which I had found Jervaise Clump, but descended the hill on the opposite side; and, after he had gone for five minutes or so, I got up and took a view of the prospect in that direction. I had no thought of spying upon him. I just wished to see if the Home Farm lay over there, as I guessed it must from my memory of the general lie of the land during our moonlit return to the Hall.

I was right. The farm was clearly visible from the northern slope of the hill—an L-shaped, low, white house with a high, red-tiled roof. It stood on another little tumulus about a mile away, a small replica of Jervaise Clump; and the whole

house was visible above the valley wood that lay between us.

At first I could not decide why the effect of the place gave me an impression of being unusual, and finally decided that this apparent air of individuality was due to the choice of site. In that country all the farms were built in the lower lands, crouching under the lee of woods and hills, humbly effacing themselves before the sovereignty of the Hall. The Home Farm alone, as far as I could see, presented a composed and dignified face to its overlord.

'There is a quality about these Bankses,' I thought, and then corrected the statement by adding, 'about the children, at least.' From what Arthur Banks had said, I gathered that his father conformed to the faith of the estate, both in act and spirit.

I stared at the Farm for a few minutes, wondering what that French wife might be like. I found it difficult to picture the *ci-devant* governess in those surroundings, and more particularly as the mother of these two fascinating children. They, like their home, produced an effect of being different from the common average. . . .

I became aware that the green of woods and grass had leapt to attention, and that sprawling shadows had suddenly come into being and were giving a new solidity to the landscape. Also, I felt a touch of unexpected warmth on my right cheek.

I returned to the place where Banks and I had talked, and sat down again facing the glorious light of the delivered sun. And almost at once I was overcome by an intense desire to sleep. My purpose of walking back to the Hall, undressing and going to bed, had become impossible. I stretched myself full length on the turf, and surrendered myself, exquisitely, to the care of the sunlight.

VI

MORNING

I AWOKE suddenly to the realisation of sound. The world about me was alive with a murmurous humming. It was as if in passing through the silent aisles of sleep, some door had been unexpectedly thrown open and let in the tumultuous roar of life from without—or as if after a brief absence I had returned and with one movement had re-established all the communications of my body.

All sense of tiredness had left me. I opened my eyes and saw that the sun had leapt far up into the sky. The whole population of Jervaise Clump was plunged into the full bustle of its daily business. Industrious bees were methodically visiting the buttercups; their bustling, commercial eagerness in marked contrast to the bluebottles and flies that seemed to choose their point of alighting with a sham intentness which did not disguise their lack of any definite purpose. Now and again a feral, domineering wasp would join the crowd, coming up with the air of a fussy, inquisitive overseer.

I looked at my watch and found that the time

was a quarter past eight. I had been asleep for nearly three hours. I had no idea what time the Jervaises had breakfast, but I knew that it was high time I got back to the Hall and changed my clothes.

I unbuttoned my coat and looked down at my shirt front and thought how incongruous and silly that absurd garb of evening dress appeared in those surroundings.

And as I trotted back to the Hall, I found a symbol in my dress for the drama of the night. It was, I thought, all artificial and unreal, now that I looked back upon it in the blaze of a brilliant August morning. Beginning with the foolishness of a dance at that time of year—even a 'tennis-dance' as they called it—the subsequent theatrical quality of the night's adventure seemed to me, just then, altogether garish and fantastic. I began to wonder how far I had dramatised and distorted the actual events by the exercise of a romantic imagination? In the sweet freshness of the familiar day, I found myself exceedingly inclined to be rational. Also, I was aware of being quite unusually hungry.

The front door of the Hall was standing wide open, and save for a glimpse of the discreet John very busy in his shirt-sleeves, I saw no one about. I was glad to reach my room unobserved. I knew that my feeling was unreasonable, but entering that sedate house, under the blaze of the morning

sun, I was ashamed of my tawdry dress. A sense of dissipation and revelry seemed to hang about me—and of an uncivilised dirtiness.

A cold bath and a change of clothes, however, fully restored my self-respect; and when I was summoned by the welcome sound of a booming gong, the balance of sensation was kicking the other beam. My sleep in the open had left me finally with a feeling of superiority. I was inclined to despise the feeble, stuffy creatures who had been shut up in a house all night.

I knew the topography of the house fairly well after my night's experience of it, and inferred the breakfast-room without any difficulty. But when I reached the door I stood and listened in considerable astonishment. Luckily, I was not tempted to make the jaunty entrance my mood prompted. I had not seen a soul as I had made my way from my room in the north wing down into the Hall. The place seemed to be absolutely deserted. And, now, in the breakfast-room an almost breathless silence was broken only by the slow grumbling of one monotonous voice, undulating about the limited range of a minor third, and proceeding with the steady fluency of a lunatic's muttering. I suppose I ought to have guessed the reasonable origin of those sounds, but I didn't, not even when the muttering fell to a pause and was succeeded by a subdued chorus, that conveyed the effect of a score of people giving a concerted but

strongly-repressed groan. After that the first voice began again, but this time it was not allowed to mumble unsupported. A murmured chant followed and caricatured it, repeating as far as I could make out the same sequence of sounds. They began 'Ah! Fah! Chah! Hen . . .' That continued for something like a minute before it came to a ragged close with another groan. Then for a few seconds the original voice continued its grumbling, and was followed by an immense quiet.

I stared through the open door of the Hall at the gay world of colour outside and wondered if I was under the thrall of some queer illusion. But as I moved towards the garden with a vague idea of regaining my sanity in the open air, the silence in the breakfast-room was broken by the sigh of a general movement, the door was opened from within, and there poured out a long procession of servants: a grave woman in black, a bevy of print-gowned maids, and finally John—all of them looking staid and a trifle melancholy, they made their way with a kind of hushed timidity towards the red-baized entrance that led to the freedoms of their proper condition.

Within the breakfast-room a low chatter of voices was slowly rising to the level of ordinary conversation.

My entrance was anything but jaunty. This was the first intimation I had received of the Jervaises' piety; and my recognition of the

ceremonial of family worship to which I had so unintuitively listened, had evoked long undisturbed memories of my boyhood. As I entered the breakfast-room, I could not for the life of me avoid a feeling of self-reproach. I had been naughty again. My host, taking the place of my father, would be vexed because I had missed prayers.

My reception did little to disperse my sense of shame. The air of Sunday morning enveloped the whole party. Even Hughes and Frank Jervaise were dressed as for a special occasion in black tail-coats and gray trousers that boasted the rigidity of a week's pressing. Not only had I been guilty of cutting family prayers; I was convicted, also, of disrespect on another count. My blue serge and bright tie were almost profane in those surroundings. The thought of how I had spent the night convicted me as a thorough-going Pagan.

'I hope you managed to get a little sleep, Mr Melhuish,' Mrs Jervaise said tepidly. 'We are having breakfast half an hour later than usual, but you were so very late last night.'

I began to mumble something, but she went on, right over me, speaking in a voice that she obviously meant to carry. 'And Brenda isn't down even now,' she said. 'In fact she's having breakfast in her own room, and I am not at all sure that we shan't keep her there all day. She has the beginning of a nasty cold brought on by her foolishness—and, besides, she has been very, very

naughty and will have to be punished.' She gave a touch of grim playfulness to her last sentence, but I should not in any case have taken her statement seriously. If I knew anything of our Brenda, it was that she was not the sort of young lady who would submit to being kept in her own room as a punishment.

'I hope the cold won't be serious,' was all I could find to say.

I looked at Mr Jervaise, who was standing despondently by the fireplace, but he did not return my glance. He presented, I thought, the picture of despair, and I suffered a sharp twinge of re-action from my championship of the Banks interest at sunrise. Those two protagonists of the drama, Banks and Brenda, were so young, eager and active. Life held so much promise for them. This ageing man by the fireplace—he must have been nearly sixty—had probably ceased to live for his own interests. His ambitions were now centred in his children. I began to feel an emotional glow of sympathy for him in his distress. Probably this youngest, most brilliant, child of his was also the most tenderly loved. It might well be that his anxiety was for her rather than for himself; that the threat to his pride of family was almost forgotten in his sincere wish for his daughter's happiness. It would appear so certain to him that she could never find happiness in a marriage with Arthur Banks.

And with that thought a suspicion of my late companion of the hill-top leapt into my mind. He had hinted at some influence or 'pull' over Brenda's father that might perhaps be used in a last emergency, although the use of it implied the taking of a slightly dishonourable advantage. Was it not probable, I now wondered, that this influence was to be obtained by working on Jervaise's too tender devotion to his daughter? Was she, perhaps, to be urged as a last resource to bear on that gentle weakness by threat or cajolery?

I began to wish that I had not been quite so friendly with Mr Banks. I had been led away by the scent and glamour of the night. Here, in this Sunday morning breakfast-room, I was able for the first time to appreciate the tragedy in its proper relation to the facts of life. I saw that Brenda's rash impulsiveness might impose a quite horrible punishment on her too-devoted father.

I turned away towards one of the window-seats. Miss Tattersall and Nora Bailey were sitting together there, pretending a conversation while they patiently awaited the coming of breakfast. Mrs Jervaise was talking now to her elder daughter; Frank was arguing some point with Gordon Hughes; and as I felt unequal to offering comfort to the lonely head of the house, so evidently wrapped in his sorrow, I preferred to range myself with the fourth group. I thought it probable that the sympathies of those two young women might

at the moment most nearly correspond to my own.

I was surprised to be greeted by Miss Tattersall with what had all the appearance of a discreetly covert wink, and I raised my eyebrows with that air of half-jocular inquiry which I fancied she would expect from me. She evaded the implied question, however, by asking me what time I 'really got to bed, after all.'

'The sun was up before I went to sleep,' I replied, to avoid the possible embarrassment of her comments should I admit to having slept in the open air; and then John and a female acolyte came in with the long-desired material of breakfast.

'Good!' I commented softly. 'I'm simply ravenous.'

'Are you?' Miss Tattersall said. 'You deserve to go without breakfast for having missed prayers,' and added in precisely the same undertone of conventional commonplace, 'I don't believe she came back at all last night.'

But, having thus piqued my curiosity, she gave me no opportunity to gratify it. She checked the question that my change of expression must have foreshadowed by a frown which warned me that she could not give any reason for her suspicion in that company.

'Later on,' she whispered, and got up from her seat in the window, leaving me to puzzle over the still uncertain mystery of Brenda's disappearance.

Miss Bailey had not, apparently, overheard the confidence. She did not, in any case, relinquish for an instant that air of simple, attentive innocence which so admirably suited the fresh prettiness of her style.

There was little conversation over the breakfast table. We were all glad to find an excuse for silence either in the pretence or reality of hunger. Old Jervaise's excuse was, quite pathetically, only a pretence; but he tried very hard to appear engrossed in the making of a hearty meal. His manner had begun to fascinate me, and I had constantly to check myself from staring at him. I found it so difficult to account satisfactorily for the effect of dread that he in some way conveyed. It was, I thought, much the effect that might have been produced by a criminal in danger of arrest.

But all of us, in our different ways, were more than a little uncomfortable. The whole air of the breakfast-table was one of dissimulation. Gordon Hughes made occasional efforts in conversation that were too glaringly irrelevant to the real subject of our thoughts. And with each beginning of his, the others, particularly Olive, Mrs Jervaise, and little Nora Bailey, plunged gallantly into the new topic with a spasmodic fervour that expended itself in a couple of minutes, and horribly emphasised the blank of silence that inevitably followed. We talked as people talk who are passing the time while they wait for some great event. But what

event we could be awaiting, it was hard to imagine—unless it were the sudden return of Brenda, with or without Banks.

And, even when we had all finished, and were free to separate, we still lingered for unnecessary minutes in the breakfast-room, as if we were compelled to maintain our pretence until the last possible moment.

Old Jervaise was the first to go. He had made less effort to disguise his preoccupation than any of us, and now his exit had something of abruptness, as if he could no longer bear to maintain any further semblance of disguise. One could only infer from the manner of his going that he passionately desired either solitude or the sole companionship of those with whom he could speak plainly of his distress.

We took our cue from him with an evident alacrity. Every one looked as if he or she were saying something that began with a half-apologetic 'Well . . .'; and Mrs Jervaise interpreted our spirit when she remarked to the company in general, 'Well, it's very late, I'm afraid, and I dare say we've all got a lot to do before we start for church. We shall have to leave soon after half-past ten,' she explained.

Frank had already left the room when she said that, she herself went out with her elder daughter, and the four of us who remained, all visitors, were left to pair with each other as we chose. It was

Miss Tattersall who determined the arrangement. She cleverly avoided the submissive glance of little Nora Bailey, and asked me unequivocally if I would care to take a 'stroll' with her in the garden.

I agreed with a touch of eagerness and followed her, wondering if her intriguing sentence before breakfast had been nothing more than a clever piece of chicane, planned to entice me into a tête-à-tête.

(I admit that this may sound like a detestable symptom of vanity on my part, but, indeed, I do not mean to imply that she cared a snap of the fingers for me personally. She was one of those women who must have some man in tow, and it happened that I was the only one available for that week-end. Frank was supposed to be in love with Miss Bailey; Gordon Hughes was engaged to some girl in the north, and used that defence without shame when it suited him.)

I did not, however, permit Miss Tattersall to see my eagerness when we were alone on the terrace together. If she was capable of chicane, so was I; and I knew that if she had anything to tell me, she would not be able to keep it to herself for long. If, on the other hand, I began to ask questions, she would certainly take a pleasure in tantalising me.

'What's this about going to church?' was my opening.

'Didn't you know?' she replied. 'We all go in solemn procession. We walk—for piety's sake—it's over a mile across the fields—and we are rounded up in lots of time, because it's a dreadful thing to get there after the bell has stopped.'

'Interrupting the service,' I put in with the usual inanity that is essential to the maintenance of this kind of conversation.

'It's worse than that,' Miss Tattersall explained gaily; 'because Mr Sturton waits for the Jervaises, to begin. When we're late we hold up the devotions of the whole parish.'

'Good Lord!' I commented; sincerely, this time; and with a thought of my socialist friend Banks. I could still sympathise with him on that score, even though I was now strongly inclined to side with the Jervaises in the Brenda affair.

'Yes, isn't it?' Miss Tattersall agreed. 'Of course, they *are* the only important people in the place,' she added thoughtfully.

'So important that it's slightly presumptuous to worship God without the sanction of their presence in church,' I remarked. And then, feeling that this comment was a trifle too strong for my company, I tried to cover it by changing the subject.

'I say, do you think we *ought* to stay on here over the week-end?' I asked. 'Wouldn't it be more tactful of us to invent excuses and leave them to themselves?'

'Certainly it would. Have you only just thought

of it?' Miss Tattersall said pertly. 'Nora and I agreed about that before we came down to prayers. But there's a difficulty that seems, for the moment, insuperable.'

'Which is?' I prompted her.

'No conveyance,' she explained. 'There aren't any Sunday trains on the loop line, Hurley Junction is fifteen miles away, the Jervaises' car is Heaven knows where, and the only other that is borrowable, Mr Turnbull's, is derelict just outside the Park gates.'

I thought she was rather inclined to make a song of it all, genuinely thankful to have so sound an excuse for staying to witness the dramatic developments that might possibly be in store for us. I do not deny that I appreciated her feeling in that matter.

'And the horses?' I suggested.

'Too far for them, in the omnibus,' she said. 'And nothing else would be big enough for four people and their luggage. But, as a matter of fact, Nora and I talked it all over with Mrs Jervaise before prayers, and she said we weren't to think of going—especially as it was all right, now, about Brenda.'

'I'm glad it *is* all right, if only for old Jervaise's sake,' I said craftily.

She looked up at me, trying to guess how far I was honest in that remark.

'But you don't really believe . . . ' she said.

'I don't see why not,' I returned.

'That Brenda *has* come back?'

'Mrs Jervaise said . . .'

'Had to, of course,' Miss Tattersall replied curtly.

I pursed my mouth and shook my head. 'It would be too risky to deceive us as crudely as that,' I said. 'Make it so much more significant if we discovered that they had been lying about her.'

Miss Tattersall looked obstinate, putting on that wooden enduring expression peculiar to fair people with pale eyes.

'I don't believe she has come back,' she said.

I continued to argue. I guessed that she had some piece of evidence in reserve; also, that for some reason she was afraid to produce it. And at last, as I had hoped, my foolish, specious arguments and apparent credulity irritated her to a pitch of exasperation.

'Oh! you can talk till all's blue,' she broke in with a flash of temper, 'but she hasn't come back.'

'But' I began.

'I know she hasn't,' Miss Tattersall said, and the pink of her cheeks spread to her forehead and neck like an overflowing stain.

'Of course if you know . . .'

'I do,' she affirmed, still blushing.

I realised that the moment had come for conciliation. 'This is tremendously interesting,' I said.

She looked up at me with a question in her face, but I did not understand until she spoke, that what had been keeping back her confession was not doubt of my trustworthiness but her fear of losing my good opinion.

'I expect you'll think it was horrid of me,' she said.

I made inarticulate sounds intended to convey an effect of reassurance.

'You *will*,' she insisted, and gave her protest a value that I felt to be slightly compromising. I could only infer that the loss of my good opinion would be fatal to her future happiness.

'Indeed, I shan't,' I protested, although I had to say it in a tone that practically confirmed this talk of ours as a perfectly genuine flirtation.

'Men have such queer ideas of honour in these things,' she went on with a recovering confidence.

'Do you mean that you—peeped,' I said. 'Into Brenda's room?'

She made a *moue* that I ought to have found fascinating, nodding emphatically.

'The door wasn't locked, then?' I put in.

She shook her head and blushed again; and I guessed in a flash that she had used the key-hole.

'But could you be sure?' I persisted. 'Absolutely sure that she wasn't there?'

'I—I only opened the door for a second,' she said, 'but I saw the bed. It hadn't been slept in.'

'And this happened?' I suggested.

'Just before I came down to prayers,' she replied.

'Well, where is she?' I asked.

Miss Tattersall laughed. Now that we had left the dangerous topic of her means of obtaining evidence, she was sure of herself again.

'She might be anywhere by this time,' she said. 'She and her lover obviously went off in the motor together at twelve o'clock. They are probably in London, by now.'

I did not give her confidence for confidence. I had practically promised Banks not to say that I had seen him on Jervaise Clump at five o'clock that morning, and I was not the least tempted to reveal that important fact to Miss Tattersall. I diverted the angle of our talk a trifle, at the same time allowing my companion to assume that I agreed with her conclusion.

'Do you know,' I said, 'that the person I'm most sorry for in this affair is Mr Jervaise. He seems absolutely broken by it.'

Miss Tattersall nodded sympathetically. 'Yes, isn't it dreadful?' she said. 'At breakfast this morning I was thinking how perfectly detestable it was of Brenda to do a think like that.'

'Or of Banks?' I added.

'Oh! it wasn't *his* fault,' Miss Tattersall said spitefully. 'He was just infatuated, poor fool. She could do anything she liked with him.'

I reflected that Olive Jervaise and Nora Bailey

would probably have expressed a precisely similar opinion.

'I suppose he's a weak sort of chap?' I said.

'No. It isn't that,' Miss Tattersall replied. 'He doesn't look weak—not at all. No! he is just infatuated—for the time being.'

We had been pacing up and down the lawn, parallel to the front of the house and perhaps fifty yards away from it—a safe distance for maintaining the privacy of our conversation. And as we came to the turn of our walk nearest to the drive, I looked back towards the avenue that intervened between us and the swelling contours of Jervaise Clump. I was thinking about my expedition towards the sunrise; and I was taken completely off my guard when I saw a tweed-clad figure emerge from under the elms and make its way with a steady determination up the drive.

'Well, one of them isn't in London, anyway,' I said.

'Why? Who?' she returned, staring, and I realised that she was too short-sighted to make out the identity of the advancing figure from that distance.

'Who *is* it?' she repeated with a hint of testiness.

I had seen by then that I had inadvertently given myself away, and I had not the wit to escape from the dilemma.

'I don't know,' I said, hopelessly embarrassed. 'It—it just struck me that this might be Banks.'

He had come nearer to us now, near enough for Miss Tattersall to recognise him; and her amazement was certainly greater than mine.

'But you're right,' she said with a little catch in her breath. 'It *is* Banks, out of uniform.'

For a moment I hoped that her surprise might cover my slip, but she was much too acute to pass such a palpable blunder as that.

'It is,' she repeated; 'but how did *you* know? I thought you had never seen him.'

'Just an intuition,' I prevaricated, and tried, I knew at the time how uselessly, to boast a pride in my powers of insight.

The effect upon my companion was neither that I hoped to produce, nor that I more confidently expected. Instead of chaffing me, pressing me for an explanation of the double game I had presumably been playing, she looked at me with doubt and an obvious loss of confidence. Just so, I thought, she might have looked at me if I had tried to take some unfair advantage of her.

'Well, I suppose it's time to get ready for church,' she remarked coldly. 'Are you coming?'

I forget what I replied. She was already slipping into the background of my interest. I was so extraordinarily intrigued by the sight of Arthur Banks, the chauffeur, boldly ringing at the front door of Jervaise Hall.

VII

NOTES AND QUERIES

MISS TATTERSALL had started for the house and her preparations for church-going, but she paused on the hither side of the drive and pretended an interest in the flower beds, until Banks had been admitted to the Hall.

I could not, at that distance, mark the expression of John's face when he answered the bell, but I noticed that there was a perceptible interval of colloquy on the doorstep before the strange visitor was allowed to enter. I should have liked to hear that conversation, and to know what argument Banks used in overcoming John's reluctance to carry the astounding message that the chauffeur had 'called' and wished to see Mr Jervaise. But, no doubt, John's diplomacy was equal to the occasion. Banks's fine effort in self-assertion was probably wasted. John would not mention the affront to the family's prestige. He would imply that Banks had come in the manner proper to his condition. 'Banks wishes to know if he might speak to you a minute, sir,' was all the warning poor old Jervaise would get of this frontal attack upon his dignities.

So far I felt a certain faith in my ability to guess the hidden action of the drama that was being played in the Hall; but beyond this point my imagination would not carry me. I could not foresee the attitude of either of the two protagonists. I thought over what I remembered of my conversation with Banks on the hill, but the only essential that stuck in my mind was that suggestion of the 'pull,' the admittedly unfair advantage that he might possibly use as a last resource. I was conscious of an earnest wish that that reserve would not be called upon. I felt, intuitively, that it would shame both the chauffeur and his master. I had still less material for any imaginative construction of old Jervaise's part in the scene now being played; a scene that I could only regard as being of the greatest moment. Indeed I believed that the conversation then taking place would reach the climax of the whole episode, and I bitterly regretted that I had apparently no possible chance of ever learning the detail of that confrontation of owner and servant. Worse still, I realised that I might have some difficulty in gathering the upshot. Whether Banks were accepted or rejected the Jervaises would not confide the story to their visitors.

I must admit that my curiosity was immensely piqued; though I flatter myself that my interest was quite legitimate, that it contained no element of vulgar inquisitiveness. Nevertheless, I did

want to know—the outcome, at least—and I could decide upon no intermediary who would give me just the information I desired.

Miss Tattersall I ruled out at once. She so persistently vulgarised the affair. I felt that in her mind she regarded the elopement as subject for common gossip; also, that she was not free from a form of generalised jealousy. She did not want Arthur Banks for herself, but she evidently thought him a rather admirable masculine figure and deplored his 'infatuation' for Brenda. Moreover, I had a notion that I had fallen from Miss Tattersall's favour. There was something in her expression when she discovered my deceit in pretending ignorance of the heroic chauffeur that portrayed a sense of personal injury. No doubt she thought that I had squeezed her confidence, while I treacherously withheld my own; and she would certainly regret that confession of having peeped into Brenda's room, even if she did not guess that I had inferred the final shame of using the keyhole. Subsequent evidence showed that my only mistake in this connection was a fatuous underestimation of the lady's sense of injury.

Of the other members of the house-party, Frank Jervaise was the only one who seemed likely or able to post me in the progress of the affair, and I felt considerable hesitation in approaching him. I could not expect a return of that mood of weakness he had exhibited the night before; and

I had no intention of courting a direct snub from him.

There remained Banks, himself, but I could not possibly have questioned him, even if my sympathies had still been engaged on his side.

And I must admit that as I paced the lawn in front of the house my sympathies were very markedly with old Jervaise. It hurt me to remember that look of apprehension he had worn at breakfast. I wanted, almost passionately, to defend him from the possibly heart-breaking consequences that might arise from no fault of his own.

I was still pondering these feelings of compassion for my host, when the church-party emerged from the front door of the Hall. If my watch were right, they were very late. Mr Sturton and his congregation would have to wait ten minutes or so in patient expectation before they could begin their devotions. And I would gladly have effaced myself if only to save the Jervaises the vexation of a still further delay. But I was too near the line of their approach. Any attempt at retreat would have been a positive rudeness.

I was framing an apology for not accompanying them to church as they came up—Mrs Jervaise and her daughter leading, with their three visitors in a bunch behind. But I was spared the necessity to offer what would certainly have been a transparent and foolish excuse for absenting myself from their religious observances. Mrs Jervaise

pulled herself together as the party approached me. She had had her head down even more than usual as they came out of the Hall, as if she were determined to butt her way through any further obstacles that might intervene between her and her duty as a Christian. At sight of me, however, she obviously stiffened. She almost held herself erect as she faced me; and her hawk nose jerked up like the head of a pick.

'So you're not coming with us, Mr Melhuish?' she said.

'I hope you will excuse me,' I replied with, I hope, a proper air of courtesy.

'Of course,' she said stiffly, her nose still balanced, as it were, in preparation to strike. Then she lowered her head with the air of one who carefully replaces a weapon, and mumbling something about being 'dreadfully late as it was,' continued her interrupted plunging into the resistances that separated her from her goal. The others followed, as if they were being trailed in her wake by invisible hawsters. None of them took any notice of me—particularly Miss Tattersall, whose failure to see me was a marked and positive act of omission.

I realised that I had been disapproved and snubbed, but I was not at all distressed by the fact. I put it all down to my failure in piety, begun with my absence from prayers and now accentuated by my absence from church. Olive, Nora Bailey, and Hughes had, I supposed, followed

Mrs Jervaise's lead in duty bound, and I knew nearly enough why Miss Tattersall had cut me. I had no idea, then, that I had come under suspicion of a far more serious offence than that of a sectarian nonconformity. Indeed, I hardly gave the matter a moment's attention. The composition of the church-party had provided me with material for further speculation concerning the subject that was absorbing all my interest. Why were old Jervaise and his son also absent from the tale of those devoted pilgrims? Was that interview in the Hall developing some crucial situation, and had Frank been called in? One thing was certain: Banks had not, as yet, come out. I had kept my eye on the front door. I could not possibly have missed him.

And it was with the idea of seeing what inferences I could draw from his general demeanour when he did come, rather than with any thought of accosting him, that I maintained my thoughtful pacing up and down the lawn on the garden side of the drive. I was relieved by the knowledge that that party of church-goers were out of the way. I had a feeling of freedom such as I used to have as a boy when I had been permitted to stay at home, on some plea or another, on a Sunday morning. I had a sense of enlargement and opportunity.

I must have been on that lawn for more than an hour, and my thoughts had covered much

ground that is not appropriate to this narrative, when I was roused to a recognition of the fact that my brief freedom was passing and that I was taking no advantage of any opportunity it might afford me.

The thing that suddenly stirred me to a new activity was the sound of the stable-clock striking twelve. Its horrible bell still had the same note of intrusive artificiality that had vexed me on the previous night, but it no longer thrilled me with any sense of stage effect. It was merely a mechanical and inappropriate invasion of that lovely Sunday morning.

There was a strange stimulation, however, in the deductions that I drew from that portentous chiming, for my interest was at once called to the fact that this was the first time that clock had struck since I had been on the lawn. I could not conceivably have missed its earlier efforts at the hours of ten and eleven. There was an insistence about the beastly thing that demanded one's attention. Had it, then, run down overnight and been recently re-wound? And if so, by whom?

It may seem absurd that I should have made so much of the inferences that followed my consideration of this problem, but the truth is that my mind was so intensely occupied with one subject, that everything seemed to point to the participation of the important Arthur Banks. At any other time I should not have troubled about the clock;

now, I looked to it for evidence. And however ridiculous it may appear, I was influenced in my excited search for clues by the fact that the clock had, after it was re-wound, only struck the hour of twelve. The significance of that deduction lay in the observation—my experience is, admittedly, limited—that clocks which have run down must be patiently made to re-toll the hours they have missed, or they will pick up their last neglected reminders of the time at the point at which they stopped. And from that I inferred an esoteric knowledge of mechanics from that re-winder of the stable-clock who had got the horrid contrivance correctly going again without imposing upon us the misery of slowly working through an almost endless series of, as it were, historical chimes. I agree that my premisses were faulty, far too lightly supported, but my mind leapt to the deduction that the mechanic in this connection could be none other than Banks. And granting that, the further inferences were, undoubtedly, important. For, as I saw them, they pointed infallibly to the conclusion that Banks had accepted once more the yoke of servitude; that he had made his exit through the servants' quarters and had meekly taken up his tasks again with the winding of the stable-clock.

(I may add that strangely enough the weak inference was correct, and the well-grounded one fallacious. If you would interpret the riddle of

human motives, put no confidence in logic. The principles of logic are founded on the psychology of Anyone. And Anyone is a mechanical waxwork, an intellectual abstraction, a thing without a soul or a sub-consciousness.)

Having taken the side of old Jervaise, I ought to have been comforted by this conclusion, and I tried to persuade myself that it indicated the only satisfactory termination to the brief drama of the night. I attempted to see the affair as a slightly ridiculous episode that had occupied exactly twelve hours and ended with an inevitable bathos. I pictured the return of a disgraced and penitent Brenda, and the temporary re-employment, as an antidote to gossip, of the defeated Banks. They would be parted, of course. She might be taken abroad, or to Scotland, and by the time she returned, he would have been sent back to the country from which he had been injudiciously recalled. Finally, old Jervaise would be able to take up his life again with his old zest. I believed that he was a man who took his pleasures with a certain gusto. He had been quite gay at the dance before the coming of the scandal that had temporarily upset his peace of mind.

All this imaginary restitution was perfectly reasonable. I could 'see' things happening just as I had thought them. The only trouble was that I could find no personal satisfaction in the consideration of the Jervaises' restored happiness.

I was aware of a feeling of great disappointment for which I could not account; and although I tried to persuade myself that this feeling was due to the evaporation of the emotional interest of the moving drama that had been playing, I found that explanation insufficient. I was conscious of a loss that intimately concerned myself, the loss of something to which I had been unconsciously looking forward.

I came out of my reverie to find that I had wandered half round the house, across the formal pleasance, and that I was now at the door leading into the kitchen garden.

I hesitated a moment with a distinct sense of wrong-doing, before I opened the door with the air of one who defies his own conscience, and passed up the avenue between the gouty espaliers—fine old veterans they were, and, as I could see, now loaded with splendid fruit. The iron gates that led out into the Park were locked, but a gardener—the head gardener, I suppose—came out of one of the greenhouses close at hand, and let me through.

I began to hurry, then. It was already twenty past twelve, and lunch was at half-past one. Just what I proposed to do, or whom I expected to see, at the Home Farm, I had no idea; but I was suddenly determined to get there and back before lunch. The walk would not take me more than a quarter of an hour each way, but, for no reason

that I could explain, the balance of half an hour or so that remained to me appeared far too short. I remember that as I walked through the wood, I persuaded myself that I wanted to see Arthur Banks, who, according to my neat and convincing theory, had taken up his work again and was, therefore, probably at the Hall. But, as I have said, our impulses are never guided, and seldom altered, by that form of reasoning known as logic.

But I never reached the farm, and I forgot all about the pretended motive of my excursion. For in two seconds I came to an entirely new judgment on the whole problem of the Jervaise-Banks intrigue, a judgment that had nothing in common with any earlier turns of sympathy from one party to the other.

Such a little thing it was that temporarily turned me into a disgusted misanthrope, nothing more than a sight of two people seen for a moment in an arresting shock of outraged amazement before I turned a disgusted back upon them and retreated moodily to the Hall. But the sight was enough to throw the affair into a new perspective, and beget in me a sense of contempt for all the actors in that midsummer comedy. 'A plague on both your houses,' I muttered to myself, but I saw them no longer as the antagonists of a romantic drama. I was suddenly influenced to a mood of scorn. Jervaises and Banks alike seemed to me unworthy

of any admiration. The members of those families were just a crowd of self-seeking creatures with no thought beyond their own petty interests. The Jervaises were snobs upset by the threat to their silly prestige. Brenda was a feather-headed madcap without a scrap of consideration for any one but herself. Banks was an infatuated fool, and the best I could hope for him was that he would realise the fact before it was too late. Frank, confound and confound him, was a coarse-minded sensualist. The thought of him drove me crazy with impatience. . . .

And what on earth could have tempted Anne to let him kiss her, if she had not been a crafty, worldly-minded schemer with an eye on the glories of ruling at the Hall?

It is true that I did not actually see him kiss her. I turned away too quickly. But the grouping left me in no doubt that if he had not kissed her already, he was on the point of doing it. In any case he had had his arm round her, and she had shown no signs of resisting him

VIII

THE OUTCAST

My first impression of the curious change in demeanour shown towards me by the Jervaises and their friends at lunch was that it had no existence outside my own recently embittered mind. I thought that I was avoiding them, not that they were avoiding me. It was not until I condescended to come down from my pinnacle of conscious superiority that I realised my own disgrace.

My effort at conversation with Mrs Jervaise was a mere act of politeness.

'I'm afraid you were rather late this morning,' I said. It was not, perhaps, a tactful remark, but I could think of nothing else. All the church-party were stiff with the slightly peevish righteousness of those who have fulfilled a duty contrary to their real inclinations.

Mrs Jervaise lifted her nose savagely. No doubt her head went with it, but only the nose was important.

'Very late, Mr Melhuish,' she said, stared at me as if debating whether she would not instantly give me the coup de grâce, and then dipped again to the threat of the imaginary doorway.

'Mr Sturton give you a good sermon?' I continued, still suffering from the delusion that I was graciously overlooking their obvious inferiority to myself.

'He is a very able man; very able,' Mrs Jervaise said, this time without looking up.

'You are lucky to have such a good man as vicar,' I said. 'Sometimes there is—well, a lack of sympathy between the Vicarage and the Hall. I remember—the case isn't quite parallel, of course, but the moral is much the same—I remember a curate my father had once . . .'

Now, my story of that curate is thoroughly sound. It is full of incident and humour and not at all derogatory to the prestige of the church. I have been asked for it, more than once, by hostesses. And though I am rather sick of it myself, I still fall back on it in cases of such urgency as I judged the present one to be. I thought that I had been lucky to get so easy an opening to produce the anecdote with relevance, and I counted on it for a good five minutes relief from the constraint of making polite conversation.

Mrs Jervaise's response began to open my eyes to the state of the new relations that now existed between myself and the rest of the party. She did not even allow me to begin. She ignored my opening entirely, and looking down the table towards her husband said, 'Mr Sturton preached from the tenth of Hebrews, "Let us hold fast

the profession of our faith without wavering." Quite a coincidence, wasn't it?"

'Indeed? Yes, quite a coincidence,' Mr Jervaise replied without enthusiasm. He did not look as cheerful as I had anticipated, but he wore the air of a man who has had at least a temporary reprieve.

'Olive and I were quite struck by it; weren't we, dear?' Mrs Jervaise continued, dragging in her daughter's evidence.

'Yes, it was very odd,' Olive agreed tepidly.

I never knew what the coincidence was, but I judge from Mrs Jervaise's insistence that it was something perfectly futile.

I glanced across at Hughes, and guessed that he was not less bored than I was myself, but when I caught his eye he looked hastily away.

I was beginning to wonder what I had done, but I valiantly tried again.

'Don't you think it possible that many cases of apparent coincidences are probably due to telepathy?' I said genially, addressing the dangerous-looking profile of my hostess.

She gave an impatient movement of her head that reminded me of a parrot viciously digging out the kernel of a nut.

'I really can't say,' she said, pointedly turned to Gordon Hughes, who was on her other side, and asked him if he had played much tennis lately.

I looked round the table for help, but none of the party would meet my eyes, avoiding my

glance with a determination that could not be mistaken. I might have suffered from some loathsome deformity. Frank, alone, appeared unaware of my innocent appeal for an explanation. He was bending gloomily over his plate, apparently absorbed in his own thoughts—though how any man could be gloomy after his recent experience it was beyond me to imagine.

My astonishment flamed into a feeling of acute annoyance. If any one had spoken to me at that moment, I should have been unforgivably rude. But no one had the least intention of speaking to me, and I had just sense enough to restrain myself from demanding an apology from the company at large. That was my natural inclination. I had been insulted; outraged. I was the Jervaises' guest, and whatever they imagined that I had done, they owed it to me and to themselves to treat me with a reasonable courtesy.

It was a detestable situation, and I was completely floored by it for the moment. We were not half-way through lunch, and I felt that I could not endure to sit there for another twenty minutes, avoided, proscribed, held fast in a pillory, a butt for the sneers of any fool at the table. On the other hand, if I got up and marched out of the room, I should be acknowledging my defeat—and my guilt of whatever crime I was supposed to have committed. If I ever wished to justify my perfect innocence, I should forfeit my chances,

at once, by accepting the snub I had received. To do that would be to acknowledge my sense of misbehaviour.

I leaned a little forward and glanced at Miss Tattersall who was sitting just beyond Nora Bailey on my side of the table. And I saw that my late confidante, the user of keyholes, was faintly smiling to herself with an unmistakable air of malicious satisfaction.

I wished, then, that I had not looked. I was no longer quite so conscious of outraged innocence. It is true that I was guiltless of any real offence, but I saw that the charge of complicity with the chauffeur—a charge that had certainly not lost in substance or in its suggestion of perfidy by Miss Tattersall's rendering—was one that I could not wholly refute. I was in the position of a man charged with murder on good circumstantial evidence; and my first furious indignation began to give way to a detestable feeling of embarrassment, momentarily increased by the necessity to sit in silence while the inane chatter of the luncheon table swerved past me. If I had had one friend with whom I could have talked, I might have been able to recover myself, but I defy any one in my situation to maintain an effective part with no active means of expression.

I glanced a trifle desperately at Olive Jervaise. I judged her to be rather a colourless creature who would not have the spirit openly to snub me. She

was nearly opposite to me, between her brother and Hughes, and well placed for an open attack if I could once engage her attention. But when I came to consider an opening, every reasonably appropriate topic seemed to have some dangerous relation to the *affaire Brenda*. Any reference to the dance, to the Sturtons, the place, the weather, suddenly assumed in my mind the appearance of a subtle approach to the subject I most wished to avoid. If I was, indeed, regarded in that house as a spy in league with the enemy, the most innocent remark might be construed into an attempt to obtain evidence.

I fancy, too, that I was subject to an influence other than the heightened self-consciousness due to my awkward situation. I had only just begun to realise that the absence of Brenda must be a horribly insistent fact to her own family. She was so entirely different from the rest of them. Her vivacity, her spirit must have shone amidst the nervous respectability of this dull and fearful household like the gleam of unexpected water in the blankness of a desert. Her absence must have seemed to them a positive thing. Probably every one at the table was thinking of her at that moment. And the result of this combined thought was producing a hallucination of Brenda in my mind, strong enough to hypnotise me. In any case, her apparition stood at the end of every avenue of conversation I could devise. I could think of

no opening that did not lead straight up to the subject of her absence.

And even while I was still pondering my problem (I had come to such fantastic absurdities as contemplating an essay on the Chinese gamut, rejecting it on the grounds that Brenda was the only musician in the family), that awful lunch was abruptly closed by a unanimous refusal of the last course. Perhaps the others were as eager as I was to put an end to that ordeal; all of them, that is, with the exception of the spiteful snake who was responsible for my humiliation.

The family managed to get out of the room this time without their usual procrastinating civilities. I went ahead of Frank and Hughes. I intended to spend a lonely afternoon in thinking out some plan for exposing the treachery of Grace Tattersall, but as I was crossing the Hall, Frank Jervaise came up behind me.

'Look here, Melhuish,' he said.

I looked. I did more than that; I confronted him. There is just a suspicion of red in my hair, and on occasion the influence of it is shown in my temper. It must have shown then, for Jervaise was visibly uncomfortable.

'It's no damned good being so ratty, Melhuish,' he said. 'Jolly well your own fault, anyway.'

'What's my own fault?' I demanded.

'We can't talk here,' he said uneasily. 'Let's go down the avenue.'

I had an impression that he was going to offer to fight me. I certainly hoped that he would.

‘Very well,’ I agreed.

But when he spoke again, I realised that it was as a lawyer and not as a fighter. He had, indeed, been preparing a cautious impeachment of me. We had reached the entrance to the avenue before he began, and the cloister of its cool shade seemed a sufficiently appropriate setting for his forensic diplomacy. Outside, in the glare of the brilliant August sun, I should have flared out at him. In the solemnity of that Gothic aisle, I found influences which helped me to maintain a relative composure.

He posed his first question with an assumed indifference.

‘Why didn’t you sleep in the house last night?’ he asked.

I took time to consider my answer; I was taken aback by his knowledge of the fact he had disclosed. My first impulse was to retort ‘How do you know that I didn’t sleep in the house?’ but I was determined to be very cautious at the outset of this cross-examination. Obviously he meant it to take the form of a cross-examination. I was equally determined that I would presently reverse the parts of counsel and witness—or was I the prisoner giving evidence on my own behalf?

We must have gone another fifteen or twenty deliberate paces before I replied,—

‘I’ll answer that question in a minute. I should

like to know first what grounds you have for stating that I didn't sleep in the house?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'You admit that you didn't?' he retorted.

'If you're going to conduct your conversation on the principles of the court room,' I said, 'the only thing I can do is to adopt the same method.'

He ignored that. 'You admit that you didn't sleep in the house?' he repeated.

'I'll admit nothing until I know what the devil you're driving at,' I replied.

He did not look at me. He was saving himself until he reached the brow-beating stage. But I was watching him—we were walking a yard or two apart—and I noted his expression of simulated indifference and forbearance, as he condescendingly admitted my claim to demand evidence for his preliminary accusation.

'You were very late coming down,' he began and paused, probably to tempt me into some ridicule of such a worthless piece of testimony.

'Go on,' I said.

'You were seen coming into the house after eight o'clock in the morning,' he continued, paused again and then, as I kept silence, added, 'In evening dress.'

'Is that all?' I asked.

It was not. He had kept the decisive accusation until the end.

'Your bed had not been slept in,' he concluded

wearily, as if to say, 'My good idiot, why persist in this damning assumption of innocence?'

'You've been examining the servants, I see,' I remarked.

He was not to be drawn by such an ingenuous sneer as that. 'The housekeeper told the mater when she came back from church,' he said. 'I suppose the thing came up in some arrangement of household affairs.'

'Very likely,' I agreed; 'but why did your mother tell *you*?'

I saw at once that he meant to evade that question if possible. For some reason Miss Tattersall was to be kept out of the case. Possibly she had made terms to that effect. More probably, I thought, Jervaise was a trifle ashamed of the source of his evidence against me.

'Oh! look here, Melhuish,' he said, with a return to his bullying manner. 'You're only making things look worse for yourself by all this beating about the bush. It's evident that you didn't sleep in the house, and I want to know why.'

'Is sleeping in the house a condition of your hospitality?' I asked.

'Not in ordinary circumstances,' he said. 'But the circumstances are not ordinary. I suppose you haven't forgotten that something happened last night which very seriously affects us?'

'I haven't, but I don't see what the deuce it's got to do with me,' I returned.

'Nor I; unless it's one of your idiotic, romantic tricks,' he retorted; 'but I have very good evidence, all the same, that you were concerned in it.'

'Oh! is that what you're accusing me of?' I said.

'It is,' Jervaise replied.

'Then I can put your mind at rest,' I said. 'I am ready to swear by any oath you like that I had nothing whatever to do with your sister's elopement, and that I know . . . ' I was going to add 'nothing more about it than you do yourself,' but remembering my talk with Banks, I decided that that was not perfectly true, and with the layman's respect for the sanctity of an oath I concluded, 'and that I know very little more about it than *you* do.'

'It's that little bit more that is so important,' Jervaise commented sardonically.

After all, a legal training does count for something. I was not his match in this kind of give and take, and I decided to throw down my hand. I was not incriminating Banks. I knew nothing about his movements of the night, and in that morning interview with old Jervaise the most important admission of all must almost certainly have been made.

'Well, you have a right to know that,' I began, 'although I don't think you and your family had any right whatever to be so damnably rude to me

at lunch, on the mere spiteful accusations of Miss Tattersall.'

'Miss Tattersall?' Jervaise put in, with a very decent imitation of surprise.

'Oh! I'm going to be perfectly honest with you,' I returned. 'Can't you drop that burlesque of the legal manner and be equally honest with me?'

'Simply dunno what you're driving at,' he said.

'Very well, then, answer the question you shirked just now,' I retorted. 'Why did your mother rush to tell you that I hadn't slept in the house last night?'

'The mater's in an awful state of nerves,' he said.

Incidentally I had to admit to myself that I had not made sufficient allowance for that indubitable fact, but I chose to disregard it at the moment. I wanted to be sure of the treachery of Grace Tattersall.

'You asked me not to beat about the bush, a minute ago,' I said, 'and now you're trying to dodge all my questions with the most futile and palpable evasions.'

'For instance?' he replied calmly, with a cunning that nearly trapped me. For when I tried to recall, as I thought I could, a specific and convincing instance of his evasion, I realised that to cite a case would only draw us into an irrelevant bickering over side issues.

'Your last three or four answers were all obvious equivocations,' I said, and raising my voice I went straight on over his attempt to expostulate by adding, 'And if Mrs Jervaise's state of nerves is an excuse for her confiding in *you*, it isn't, in my opinion, any excuse for her confiding in Miss Tattersall and Nora Bailey and Hughes, and setting them on to—ostracise me.'

'Oh! come,' Jervaise protested, a little taken aback. I had put him in a quandary, now. He had to choose between an imputation on his mother's good taste, savoir faire, breeding—and an admission of the rather shameful source of the present accusation against me.

'As a matter of fact, it's absolutely clear to me that Grace Tattersall is at the bottom of all this,' I continued to get this point settled. 'I'm perfectly sure your mother would not have treated me as she did unless her mind had been perverted in some way.'

'But why should she—Miss Tattersall—I mean she seemed rather keen on you . . .'

'I can explain that,' I interrupted him. 'She wanted to gossip with me about the whole affair this morning, and she made admissions that I suppose she was subsequently ashamed of. And after that she discovered by an accident that I had met Banks, and jumped to the totally false conclusion that I had been drawing her out for my own disreputable purposes.'

'Where did you meet Banks?' was Jervaise's only comment on this explanation.

'I'm going to tell you that,' I said. 'I told you that I meant to be perfectly honest with you, but I want to know first if I'm not right about Miss Tattersall.'

'She has been a bit spiteful about you,' he admitted.

'So that's settled,' I replied by way of finally confirming his admission. 'Now, I'll tell you exactly what happened last night.'

I made a fairly long story of it; so long that we reached the lodge at the Park gates before I had finished, and turned back again up the avenue. I was careful to be scrupulously truthful, but I gave him no record of any conversation that I thought might, however indirectly, inculcate Banks.

Jervaise did not once interrupt me, but I saw that he was listening with all his attention, studying my statement as he might have studied a complicated brief. And when I had done, he thrust out his ugly underlip with an effect of sneering incredulity that I found almost unendurably irritating.

'Do you mean to say that you don't believe me?' I asked passionately.

We were just opposite the side road that I had taken the night before, the road that led through the thickest part of the spinney before it came out into the open within a quarter of a mile of

Jervaise Clump. And as if both our minds had been unconsciously occupied with the same thought, the need for a still greater privacy, we turned out of the avenue with an air of deliberate intention and a marked increase of pace. It seemed as though this secluded alley had, from the outset, been the secret destination of our walk.

He did not reply to my challenging question for perhaps a couple of minutes. We were walking quite quickly, now. Until the heat of our rising anger could find some other expression, we had to seek relief in physical action. I had no doubt that Jervaise in his own more restrained way was as angry as I was myself. His sardonic sneer had intensified until it took the shape of a fierce, brooding anger.

We were out of sight of the junction of the side road with the avenue, when he stopped suddenly and faced me. He had manifestly gathered himself together for a great effort that was, as it were, focused in the malignant, dominating scowl of his forbidding face. The restraint of his language added to the combined effect—consciously studied, no doubt—of coarse and brutal authority.

'And why did you spy on me this morning?' he asked. 'Why did you follow me up to the Home Farm, watch me while I was talking to Miss Banks, and then slink away again?'

I have two failings that would certainly have disqualified me if I had ever attempted to adopt

the legal profession. The first is a tendency to blush violently on occasion. The second is to see and to sympathise with my opponent's point of view. Both these failings betrayed me now. The blush seemed to proclaim my guilt; my sudden understanding of Jervaise's temper confirmed it.

For, indeed, I understood precisely at that moment how enraged he must be against me. He, like Miss Tattersall, had been playing an underhand game, though his was different in kind. He had been seduced (my bitterness against Anne found satisfaction in laying the blame at her door!) into betraying the interests of his own family. *I* did not, in a sense, blame him for that; I had, the night before, been more than a little inclined to honour him for it; but I saw how, from the purely Jervaise point of view, his love-making would appear as something little short of criminal. And to be caught in the act, for I had caught him, however unwillingly, must have been horribly humiliating for him. Little wonder that coming home, hot and ashamed, from his rendezvous, and being confronted with all the tale of my duplicity, he had flamed into a fury of resentment against me. I understood that beyond any question. Only one point still puzzled me. How had he been able until this moment to restrain his fury? I could but suppose that there was something cold-blooded, calculating, almost reptilian in his character; that he had planned cautiously and

far-sightedly what he regarded as the best means for bringing about my ultimate disgrace.

And now my blush and my powers of sympathy had betrayed me. I felt like a convicted criminal as I said feebly, 'Oh! that was an accident, absolutely an accident, I assure you. I had no sort of idea where you were when I went up to the Home Farm . . .'

'After keeping an eye on the front of the house all the morning,' he put in viciously.

A sense of awful frustration overcame me. Looking back on the past fifteen hours, I saw all my actions ranged in a long incriminating series. Each one separately might be explained, but regarded as a consequent series, those entirely inconsequent doings of mine could bear but one explanation: I was for some purpose of my own, whether idiotically romantic or not, on the side of Banks and Brenda. I had never lifted a finger to help them; I was not in their confidence; and since the early morning I had withdrawn a measure of my sympathy from them. But I could not prove any of these things. I could only affirm them, and this domineering bully, who stood glowering at me, wanted proof or nothing. He was too well accustomed to the methods of criminals to accept explanations.

'You don't believe me?' I said.

'Candidly, I don't,' he replied.

And at that my temper finally blazed. I could

not bear any longer either that awful sense of frustration or the sight of Frank Jervaise's absurdly portentous scowl.

I did not clench my fists, but I presume my purpose showed suddenly in my face, for he moved quickly backwards with a queer, nervous jerk of the head that was the precise counterpart of the parrot-like twist his mother had given at the luncheon table. It was an odd movement, at once timid and vicious, and in an instant I saw the spirit of Frank Jervaise revealed to me. He was a coward, hiding his weakness under that coarse mask of the brooding, relentless hawk. He had winced and retreated at my unspoken threat, as he had winced at the thought of his thrashing at school. He had taken his punishment stoically enough then, and might take another with equal fortitude now; though he had been weakened in the past five or six years by the immunity his frowning face had won for him. But he could not meet the promise of a thrashing. I saw that he would do anything, make any admission, to avoid that.

'Look here, Melhuish . . .' he began, but I cut him short.

'Oh! go to hell,' I said savagely.

I was disappointed. I wanted to fight him. I knew now that since the scene I had witnessed in the wood the primitive savage in me had been longing for some excuse to break out in its own

primitive, savage way. And once again I was frustrated. I was just too civilised to leap at him without further excuse.

He gave me none.

'If you're going to take that tone . . .' he said with a ridiculous affectation of bravado, and did not complete his sentence. His evasion was, perhaps, the best that he could have managed in the circumstances. It was so obvious that only the least further incentive was required to make me an irresponsible madman. And he dared not risk it.

He turned away with a pretence of dignity, the craven brag of a schoolboy who says, 'I could lick you if I wanted to, but I don't happen to want to.' I watched him as he walked back towards the avenue with a deliberation that was so artificial, I could swear that when he reached the turn he would break into a run.

I stood still in the same place long after he was out of sight. As my short-lived passion evaporated, I began to realise that I was really in a very awkward situation. I could not and would not return to the Hall. I had offended Frank Jervaise beyond all hope of reconciliation. He would never forgive me for that exposure of his cowardice. And if I had not had a single friend at the house before, I could, after the new report of my treachery had been spread by Frank, expect nothing but the bitterness of open enemies. No doubt they would

essay a kind of frigid politeness, their social standards would enforce some show of outward courtesy to a guest. But I simply could not face the atmosphere of the Hall again. And here I was without my luggage, without even a hat, and with no idea where I could find refuge. The only idea I had was that of walking fifteen miles to Hurley Junction on the chance of getting a train back to town.

It was an uncommonly queer situation for a perfectly innocent man, week-ending at a country house. I should have been ashamed to face the critics if I had made so improbable a situation the crux of a play. But the improbability of life constantly outruns the mechanical inventions of the playwright and the novelist. Where life, with all its extravagances, fails, is in its refusal to provide the apt and timely coincidence that shall solve the problem of the hero. As I walked on slowly towards Jervaise Clump, I had little hope of finding the peculiarly appropriate vehicle that would convey me to Hurley Junction; and I did not relish the thought of that fifteen mile walk, without a hat.

I kept to the road, skirting the pudding basin hill, and came presently to the fence of the Park and to what was evidently a side gate—not an imposing wrought-iron erection between stone pillars such as that which announced the front entrance, but just a rather high-class six-barred gate.

I hesitated a minute or two, with the feelings of one who leaves the safety of the home enclosure for the unknown perils of the wild, and then with a sigh of resignation walked boldly out on to the high road.

I had no notion in which direction Hurley Junction lay, but luck was with me, so far. There was a fourth road, opposite the Park gate, and a sign-post stood at the junction of what may once have been the main cross-roads—before some old Jervaise land-robber pushed the park out on this side until he was stopped by the King's highway.

On the sign-post I read the indication that Hurley Junction was distant $14\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and that my direction was towards the north; but I felt a marked disinclination to begin my walk.

It was very hot, and the flies were a horrible nuisance. I stood under the shadow of the hedge, flapped a petulant handkerchief at the detestably annoying flies, and stared down the road towards the far, invisible distances of Hurley. No one was in sight. The whole country was plunged in the deep slumber of a Sunday afternoon, and I began to feel uncommonly sleepy myself. I had, after all, only slept for a couple of hours or so that morning.

I yawned wearily and my thoughts ran to the refrain of 'fourteen and a half miles; fourteen and a half miles to Hurley Junction.'

'Oh! well,' I said to myself at last. 'I suppose

it's got to be done,' and I stepped out into the road, and very lazily and wearily began my awful tramp. The road ran uphill in a long curve encircling the base of the hill, and I suppose I took about ten minutes to reach the crest of the rise. I stayed there a moment to wipe my forehead and slap peevishly at my accompanying swarm of flies. And it was from there I discovered that I had stumbled upon another property of the Jervaise comedy. Their car—I instantly concluded that it was their car—stood just beyond the rise, drawn in on to the grass at the side of the road, and partly covered with a tarpaulin—it looked, I thought, like a dissipated roysterer asleep in the ditch.

I decided, then, without the least compunction, that this should be my heaven-sent means of reaching the railway. The Jervaises owed me that; and I could leave the car at some hotel at Hurley and send the Jervaises a telegram. I began to compose that telegram in my mind as I threw off the tarpaulin preparatory to starting the car. But Providence was only laughing at me. The car was there and the tank was full of petrol, but neither the electric starter nor the crank that I found under the seat would produce anything but the most depressing and uninspired clanking from the mechanism that should have responded with the warm, encouraging thud of renewed life.

I swore bitterly (I can drive, but I'm no expert),

climbed into the tonneau, pulled back the tarpaulin over me like a tent to exclude those pestilent flies, and settled myself down to draw one or two deep and penetrating inductions.

My first was that Banks had brought the car here the night before with the fixed intention of abducting Brenda Jervaise.

My second was that the confounded fellow had cautiously removed some essential part of the car's mechanism.

My third, that he would have to come back and fetch the car sometime, and that I would then blackmail him into driving me to Hurley Junction.

I did not trouble to draw a fourth induction. I was cool and comfortable under the shadow of the cover. The flies, although there were many openings for them, did not favour the darkness of my tent. I leaned well back into the corner of the car and joined the remainder of the county in a calm and restful sleep.

IX

BANKS

I WAS awakened by the sound of footsteps on the road—probably the first footsteps that had passed during the hour and a half that I had been asleep. I was still lazily wondering whether it was worth while to look out, when the tarpaulin was smartly drawn off the car and revealed me to the eyes of the car's guardian, Arthur Banks.

His first expression was merely one of surprise. He looked as startled as if he had found any other unlikely thing asleep in the car. Then I saw his surprise give way to suspicion. His whole attitude stiffened, and I was given an opportunity to note that he was one of those men who grow cool and turn pale when they are angry.

My first remark to him was ill-chosen.

'I've been waiting for you,' I said.

Probably my last thought before I went to sleep had concerned the hope that Banks would be the first person I should see when I woke; and that thought now came up and delivered itself almost without my knowledge.

'They have put you in charge, I suppose,' he returned grimly. 'Well, you needn't have

worried. I'd just come to take the car back to the house.'

I had again been taken for a spy, but this time I was not stirred to righteous indignation. The thing had become absurd. I had for all intents and purposes been turned out of Jervaise Hall for aiding and abetting Banks, and now he believed me to be a sort of prize crew put aboard the discovered motor by the enemy.

My situation had its pathetic side. I had, by running away, finally branded myself in the Jervaises' eyes as a mean and despicable traitor to my own order; and now it appeared that I was not to be afforded even the satisfaction of having proved loyal to the party of the Home Farm. I was a pariah, the suspect of both sides, the ill-treated hero of a romantic novel. I ought to have wept, but instead of that I laughed.

Perhaps I was still a little dazed by sleep, for I was under the impression that any kind of explanation would be quite hopeless, and I had, then, no intention of offering any. All I wanted was to be taken to Hurley Junction; to get back to town and forget the Jervaises' existence.

Banks's change of expression when I laughed began to enlighten my fuddled understanding. I realised that I had no longer to deal with a suspicious, wooden-headed lawyer, but with a frank, kindly human being.

'I don't see the joke,' he said, but his look of cold anger was fading rapidly.

'The joke,' I said, 'is a particularly funny one. I have quarrelled with the entire Jervaise family and their house-party. I have been openly accused by Frank Jervaise of having come to Thorp-Jervaise solely to aid you in your elopement; and my duplicity being discovered I hastened to run away, leaving all my baggage behind, in the fear of being stood up against a wall and shot at sight. I set out, I may add, to walk fourteen miles to Hurley Junction, but on the way I discovered this car, from which you seem to have extracted some vital organ. So I settled myself down to wait until you should return with its heart, or lungs, or whatever it is you removed. And now, my dear chap, I beseech you to put the confounded thing right again and drive me to Hurley. I've suffered much on your account. It's really the least you can do by way of return.'

He stared at me in amazement.

'But, honestly, no kid . . .' he remarked.

I saw that, naturally enough, he could not make head or tail of my story.

'Oh! it's all perfectly true, in effect,' I said. 'I can't go into details. As a matter of fact, all the Jervaises' suspicions came about as a result of our accidental meeting on the hill last night. I said nothing about it to them, you understand; and then they found out that I hadn't slept in the

house, and Miss Tattersall discovered by accident that I knew you by sight—that was when you came up to the house this morning—and after that everything I've ever done since infancy has somehow gone to prove that my single ambition in life has always been to help you in abducting Brenda Jervaise. Also, I wanted to fight Frank Jervaise an hour or two ago in the avenue. So, my dear Banks, have pity on me and help me to get back to London.'

Banks grinned. 'No getting back to London to-night,' he said. 'Last train went at 3.19.'

'Well, isn't there some hotel in the neighbourhood?' I asked.

He hesitated, imaginatively searching the county for some hotel worthy of receiving me.

'There's nothing decent nearer than Godbury,' he said. 'Twenty-three miles. There's an inn at Hurley of a sort. There's no town there to speak of, you know. It's only a junction.'

'Oh! well, I'll risk the inn at Hurley for one night,' I said.

'What about your things?' he asked.

'Blast!' was my only comment.

'Rummet go I ever heard of,' Banks interjected thoughtfully. 'You don't mean as they've actually *turned you out*?'

'Well, no, not exactly,' I explained. 'But I couldn't possibly go back there.'

'What about writing a note for your things?' he suggested. 'I'd take it up.'

'And ask them to lend me the motor?'

'I don't expect they'd mind,' he said.

'Perhaps not. Anything to get rid of me,' I returned. 'But I'm not going to ask them any favours. I don't mind using the bally thing—they owe me that—but I'm not going to ask them for it.'

'Must have been a fair old bust up,' he commented, evidently curious still about my quarrel at the Hall.

'I told you that it ended with my wanting to fight Frank Jervaise,' I reminded him.

He grinned again. 'How did he get out of it?' he asked.

'What makes you think he wanted to get out of it?' I retorted.

He measured me for a moment with his eye before he said, 'Mr Frank isn't the fighting sort. I've seen him go white before now, when I've took the corner a bit sharp.' He paused a moment before adding, 'But they're all a bit like that.'

'Nervous at dangerous corners,' I commented, sharpening his image for him.

'Blue with funk,' he said.

It occurred to me that possibly some hint of the family taint in Brenda had influenced, at the last moment, the plan of her proposed elopement; but I said nothing of that to Banks.

'I'd better leave my things,' I said, returning to the subject which was of chief importance to me. You take me to that inn at Hurley. If I arrive in a motor, they'll take me in all right, even though I haven't any luggage. I'll invent some story as we go.'

'They'd take you *in*,' Banks replied thoughtfully. 'Tisn't hardly more than a public house, really.'

I thought that some strain of the gentleman's servant in him was concerned with the question of the entertainment proper to my station.

'It's only for one night,' I remarked.

'Oh! yes,' he said, obviously thinking of something else.

'Too far for you to go?' I asked.

He glanced at his wrist watch. 'Quarter past five,' he said. 'It'd take me the best part of two hours to get there and back—the road's none too good.'

'You don't want to go?' I said.

'Well, no, honestly I don't,' he replied. 'The fact is I want to see Mr Jervaise again.' He smiled as he added, 'My little affair isn't settled yet by a good bit, you see.'

I sheered away from that topic; chiefly, I think, because I wanted to avoid any suggestion of pumping him. When you have recently been branded as a spy, you go about for the next few days trying not to feel like one.

'Isn't there any place in the village I could go to?' I asked.

He shook his head. 'There's one pub—a sort of beerhouse—but they don't take people in,' he said.

'No lodgings?' I persisted.

'The Jervaises don't encourage that sort of thing,' he replied. 'Afraid of the place getting trippery. I've heard them talking about it in the car. And as they own every blessed cottage in the place . . . ' He left the deduction to my imagination, and continued with the least touch of bashfulness, 'You wouldn't care to come to us, I suppose?'

'To the Home Farm?' I replied stupidly. I was absurdly embarrassed. If I had not chanced to see that grouping in the wood before lunch, I should have jumped at the offer. But I knew that it must have been Miss Banks who had seen me—spying. Jervaise had had his back to me. And she would probably, I thought, take his view of the confounded accident. She would be as anxious to avoid me as I was to avoid her. Coming so unexpectedly, this invitation to the Farm appeared to me as a perfectly impossible suggestion.

Banks, naturally, misinterpreted my embarrassment.

'I suppose it would put you in the wrong, as it were—up at the Hall,' he said. 'Coming to us after that row, I mean, 'd look as if what they'd been saying was all true.'

'I don't care a hang about *that*,' I said earnestly. In my relief at being able to speak candidly I forgot that I was committing myself to an explanation; and Banks inevitably wandered into still more shameful misconceptions of my implied refusal.

'Only a farm, of course . . . ' he began.

'Oh! my dear chap,' I interposed quickly. 'Do believe me, I'd far sooner stay at the Home Farm than at Jervaise Hall.'

He looked at me with rather a blank stare of inquiry.

'Well, then?' was all he found to say.

I could think of nothing whatever.

For a second or two we stared at one another like antagonists searching for an unexposed weakness. He was the first to try another opening.

'Fact is, I suppose,' he said tentatively, 'that you'd like to be out of this affair altogether? Had enough of it, no doubt?'

I might have accepted that suggestion without hurting Banks's self-respect. I saw the excuse as a possibility that provided an honourable way of escape. I had but to say, 'Well, in a way, yes. I have, in all innocence, got most confoundedly entangled in an affair that hasn't anything whatever to do with me, and it seems that the best thing I can do now is to clear out.' He would have believed that. He would have seen the justice of it. But the moment this easy way of escape was made clear to me, I knew that I did not want

to take it; that in spite of everything, I wanted, almost passionately, to go to the Home Farm.

I was aware of a sudden clarity of vision. The choice that lay before me appeared suddenly vital; a climax in my career, a symbol of the essential choice that would determine my future.

On the one hand was the security of refusal. I could return, unaffected, to my familiar life. Presently, when the Jervaise nerves had become normal again, the Jervaises themselves would recognise the egregious blunder they had made in their treatment of me. They would apologise—through Frank. And I should go on, as I had begun. I was already decently successful. I should become more successful. I could look forward to increased financial security, to a measure of fame, to all that is said to make life worth living. And as I saw it, then, the whole prospect of that easy future, appeared to me as hopelessly boring, worthless, futile.

On the other hand . . .? I had no idea what awaited me on the other hand. I could see that I should have to accept the stigma that had been put upon me; that I should be thrown into the company of a young woman whose personality had extraordinarily attracted me, who probably detested me, and who might now be engaged to a man I very actively disliked; that I should involve myself in an affair that had not fully engaged my sympathy (I still retained my feeling

of compassion for old Jervaise); that I should, in short, be choosing the path of greatest resistance and unpleasantness, with no possibility of getting any return other than scorn and disgrace.

I saw these alternatives in a flash, and no sane man would have hesitated between them for one moment.

'But look here, Banks,' I said. 'What would your mother and—and your sister say to having an unknown visitor foisted upon them without notice?'

'Oh! that'd be all right,' he said with conviction.

'There's nothing I should like better than to stay with you,' I continued, 'if I thought that you—people would care to have me.'

'Well, as a matter of fact,' he said, 'my father and mother haven't come home yet. They drove over to some relations of ours about twelve miles away, yesterday afternoon, and they won't be back till about seven, probably. Last chance my father had before harvest, and my mother likes to get away now and again when she can manage it.'

'They don't know yet, then, about you and . . . ?' I said, momentarily diverted by the new aspect this news put on the doings of the night.

'Not yet. That'll be all right, though,' Banks replied, and added as an afterthought, 'The old man may be a bit upset. I want to persuade 'em all to come out to Canada, you see. There's a chance there. Mother would come like a shot, but I'm afraid the old man'll be a bit difficult.'

'But, then, look here, Banks,' I said. 'You

won't want a stranger up there to-night of all nights—interfering with your—er—family council.'

Banks scratched his head with a professional air. 'I dunno,' he said. 'It might help.' He looked at me reflectively before adding, 'You know She's up there—of course?'

'I didn't,' I replied. 'Was she there last night when Jervaise and I went up?'

He shook his head. 'We meant to go off together and chance it,' he said. 'May as well tell you now. There's no secret about it among ourselves. And then she came out to me on the hill without her things—just in a cloak. Came to tell me it was all off. Said she wouldn't go, that way. . . . Well, we talked. . . . Best part of three hours. And the end of it was, she came back to the Farm.'

'And it isn't all off?' I put in.

'The elopement is,' he said.

'But not the proposed marriage?'

He leaned against the door of the car with the air of one who is preparing for a long story. 'You're sure you want to hear all this?' he asked.

'Quite sure—that is, if you want to tell me,' I said. 'And if I'm coming home with you, it might be as well if I knew exactly how things stand.'

'I felt somehow as if you and me were going to hit it off, last night,' he remarked shyly.

'So did I,' I rejoined, not less shy than he was. Our friendship had been admitted and confirmed.

No further word was needed. We understood each other. I felt warmed and comforted. It was good to be once more in the confidence of a fellow-man. I have not the stuff in me that is needed to make a good spy.

'Well, the way things are at present,' Banks hurried on to cover our lapse into an un-British sentimentality, 'is like this. We'd meant, as I told you, to run away . . .'

'And then she was afraid?'

'No, it was rather the other way round. It was me that was afraid. You see, I thought I should take all the blame off the old man by going off with her—him being away and all, I didn't think as even the Jervaises could very well blame it on to him, overlooking what she pointed out, as once we'd gone they'd simply have to get rid of him, too, blame or no blame. They'd never stand having him and mother and Anne within a mile of the Hall, as sort of relations. I ought to have seen that, but one forgets these things at the time.'

I nodded sympathetically.

'So what it came to,' he continued, 'was that we might as well face it out as not. She's like that—likes to have things straight and honest. So do I, for the matter of that; but once you've been a gentleman's servant it gets in your blood or something. I was three years as groom and so on up at the Hall before I went to Canada. Should have been there now if it hadn't been for

mother. I was only a lad of sixteen when I went into service, you see, and when I came back I got into the old habits again. I tell you it's difficult once you've been in service to get out o' the way of feeling that, well, old Jervaise, for instance, is a sort of little lord god almighty.'

'I can understand that,' I agreed, and added, 'but I'm rather sorry for him, old Jervaise. He has been badly cut up, I think.'

Banks looked at me sharply, with one of his keen, rather challenging turns of expression. 'Sorry for him? You needn't be,' he said. 'I could tell you something—at least, I can't—but you can take it from me that you needn't waste your pity on him.'

I realised that this was another reference to that 'pull' I had heard of, which could not be used, and was not even to be spoken of to me after I had been admitted to Banks's confidence. I realised, further, that my guessing must have gone hopelessly astray. Here was the suggestion of something far more sinister than a playing on the old man's affection for his youngest child.

'Very well, I'll take it from you,' I said. 'On the other hand, you can take it from me that old Jervaise is very much upset.'

Banks smiled grimly. 'He's nervous at dangerous corners, like you said,' he returned. 'However, we needn't go into that—the point is as I began to tell you, that we've decided to face it out; and

well, you saw me go up to the Hall this morning.'

'What happened?' I asked.

'Nothing,' Banks said. 'I saw the old man and Mr Frank, and they were both polite in a sort of way—no shouting nor anything, though, of course, Mr Frank tried to browbeat me—but very firm that nothing had got to happen; no engagement or running away or anything. She was to come home and I was to go back to Canada—they'd pay my fare and so on . . .'

'And you?'

'Me? I just stuck to it we were going to get married, and Mr Frank tried to threaten me till the old man stopped him, and then I came out.'

'Did you wind up the stable-clock?' I put in.

'Yes. I forgot it last night,' he said. 'And I hate to see a thing not working properly.'

Dear Banks! I did not know, then, how characteristic that was of him.

I returned to the subject in hand.

'What do you propose to do, then?' I asked.

'To get their consent?'

'Just stick to it,' he said.

'You think they'll give way?'

'They'll have to, in the end,' he affirmed gravely, and continued in a colder voice that with him indicated a flash of temper. 'It's just their respectability they care about, that's all. If they were fond of her, or she of them, it would be another thing altogether. But she's different to all the

others, and they've never hit it off, she and them, among themselves. Why, they treat her quite differently to the others; to Miss Olive, for instance.'

'Do they?' I said, in astonishment. I had been romantically picturing Brenda as the favourite child, and I could not, at once, see her in this new light.

'She never got on with 'em, somehow,' Banks said. 'Anyway, not when they were alone. Always rows of one sort or another. They couldn't understand her, of course, being so different to the others.'

I was not satisfied with this explanation, but I did not press him for further details. His insistence on Brenda's difference from the rest of the Jervaises was evidently as far as he could get. The difference was obvious enough, certainly, but he would naturally exaggerate it. He was, as Miss Tattersall had said, 'infatuated,' but I put a more kindly construction on the description than she had done—perhaps 'enthralled' would have been a better word.

We had come to a pause. His confidences were exhausted for the present. He had told me all that it was necessary for me to know before I met Brenda and his sister; and I waited for him, now, to renew his invitation. I preferred that *he* should re-open that subject; but he came to it rather obliquely.

'Well!' he remarked. 'Might as well be getting on, I suppose?'

I nodded and got out of the car.

'Can you find your way up?' he proceeded.

'Alone?' I asked.

'It's only about half a mile,' he explained, 'You can't miss it. You see, I want to get the car back to the house. Don't do it any good standing about here. Besides, it wouldn't do for them to think as I was holding it over them.'

Even the picture of a herculean Banks holding that car over the Jervaises failed to divert me, just then. I was too much occupied with my new friend's simple absence of tact. I would sooner have faced a return to the Hall than an unsupported appearance at the Farm.

'Oh! I'm not going up there alone,' I said.

Banks was honestly surprised. 'Why not?' he asked. 'You met Anne last night, didn't you? That'll be all right. You tell her I told you to come up. *She'll* understand.'

I shook my head. 'It won't take you long to run up to the Hall and put the car in,' I said. 'I'll cut across the Park and meet you in that wood just below your house—the way that Jervaise and I went last night.'

He looked distressed. He could not understand my unwillingness to go alone, but his sense of what was due to me would not permit him to let me wait for him in the wood.

'But, I can't see . . .' he began, and then apparently realising that he was failing either in

respect or in hospitality, he continued, 'Oh! well, I'll just run up with you at once; it won't take us ten minutes, and half an hour one way or the other won't make any difference.'

I accepted his sacrifice without further protestation; and after he had carefully replaced the tarpaulin over the tonneau of the car, we set off briskly towards the Farm. About a third of a mile farther on we left the highroad for a side road, and another three or four minutes' walk up the hill brought us to the main entrance to the Farm. I saw, now, that I had come with Jervaise to a side door last night. This front approach was more imposing—up a drive through an avenue of limes. The house seen from this aspect looked very sweet and charming. It was obviously of a date not later than the sixteenth century, and I guessed that the rough-cast probably concealed a half-timber work structure. In front of it was a good strip of carefully kept lawn and flower garden. The whole place had an air of dignity and beauty that I had not expected, and I think Banks must have noticed my surprise, for he said,—

'Not bad, is it? Used to be a kind of dower house once upon a time, they say.'

'Absolutely charming,' I replied. 'Now, this is the sort of house I should like to live in.'

'I dare say it'll be to let before long,' Banks said with a touch of grim humour.

'Not to me, though,' I said.

He laughed. 'Perhaps not,' he agreed.

We had paused at the end of the little avenue for me to take in the effect of the house, and as we still stood there, the sound of a man's voice came to us through the open window of one of the rooms on the ground floor.

'Your father's home sooner than you expected,' I remarked.

'That's not the old man,' Banks said in a tone that instantly diverted my gaze from the beauties of the Home Farm.

'Who is it, then?' I asked.

'Listen!' he said. He was suddenly keen, alert and suspicious. I saw him no longer as the gentleman's servant, the product of the Jervaise estate, but as the man who had knocked about the world, who often preferred to sleep in the open.

'There are two of them there,' he said; 'Frank Jervaise and that young fellow Turnbull, if I'm not mistaken.' And even as he spoke he began hurriedly to cross the little lawn with a look of cold anger and determination that I was glad was not directed against myself.

As I followed him, it came into my mind to wonder whether Frank Jervaise had taken me with him as a protection the night before? Had he been afraid of meeting Banks? I had hitherto failed to find any convincing reason for Jervaise's queer mark of confidence in me.

X

THE HOME FARM

I MUST own that I was distinctly uncomfortable as I followed Banks into the same room in which I had sat on my previous visit to the Home Farm. The influence of tradition and habit would not let me alone. I cared nothing for the Jervaises' opinion, but I resented the unfairness of it and had all the innocent man's longing to prove his innocence—a feat that was now become for ever impossible. By accepting Banks's invitation, I had confirmed the worst suspicions the Jervaises could possibly have harboured against me.

Indeed, it seems probable that I was now revealing more shameful depths of duplicity than their most depraved imaginings had been able to picture. As I entered the room, I looked first at Frank, and his dominant emotion, just then, appeared to be surprise. For a moment I had a sense of reprieve. I guessed that he had not been truly convinced of the truth of his own accusations against me. But any relief I may have felt was dissipated at once. I saw Jervaise's look of surprise give place to a kind of perplexed anger, an expression that I could only read as conveying his amazement that any

gentleman (I am sure his thought was playing about that word) could be such a blackguard as I was now proving myself to be.

Ronnie Turnbull, also, evidently shared that opinion. The boyish and rather theatrical movement with which he turned his back upon me, showed at once that he had been coached in the suspicions that were now so finally clinched. 'This fellow simply isn't worth speaking to,' was the inarticulate message of his gesture.

And certainly I gave neither of them any occasion to speak to me. Banks's opening plunged us into one of those chaotic dialogues which are only made more confused by any additional contribution.

'What have you come up here for?' Banks asked, displaying his immediate determination to treat the invaders without respect of class on this common ground of his father's home.

'That's our affair,' Frank snapped. He looked nervously vicious, I thought, like a timid-minded dog turned desperate.

'What the devil do you mean?' Turnbull asked at the same moment, and Brenda got up from her chair and tried to address some explanation to her lover through the ominous preparatory snarlings of the *melée*.

I heard her say, 'Arthur! They've been trying to . . .' but lost the rest in the general shindy.

Turnbull, by virtue of his lung-power, was the most audible of the four.

'You've jolly well got to understand, my good man,' he was saying, 'that the sooner you get out of this the better'; and went on with more foolishness about Banks having stolen the motor—all painfully tactless stuff, if he still had the least intention of influencing Brenda, but he was young and arrogant and not at all clever.

Banks and Jervaise were sparring at each other all the time that Turnbull fulminated, and Brenda's soprano came in like a flageolet obbligato—a word or two here and there ringing out with a grateful clearness above the masculine accompaniment.

I dared, in the confusion, to glance at Anne, and she looked up at me at the same moment. She was slightly withdrawn from the tumult that drew together about the counter of the sturdy oak table in the centre of the room. She was sitting in the towering old settle by the fireplace, leaning a little forward as if she awaited her opportunity to spring in and determine the tumult when something of this grotesque male violence had been exhausted.

She looked at me, I thought, with just a touch of supplication, a look that I misinterpreted as a request to use my influence in stopping this din of angry voices that was so obviously serving no useful purpose. But I felt no inclination to respond to that appeal of hers. I had an idea that she might be going to announce her engagement to Jervaise, an announcement that would critically

affect the whole situation; and I had no wish to help her in solving the immediate problem by those means.

Perhaps she read in my face something of the sullen resentment I was feeling, for she leaned back quickly into the corner of the settle, with a movement that seemed to indicate a temporary resignation to the inevitable. I saw her as taking cover from this foolish masculine din about the table; but I had no doubt that she was still awaiting her opportunity.

It was Jervaise who brought back the unintelligible disputants to reasonable speech. He stopped speaking, stepped back on to the hearth-rug, and then addressed the loudly vociferous Turnbull.

'Ronnie!' Jervaise said in a tone that arrested attention, and having got his man's ear, added, 'Half a minute!'

'But look here, you know,' Turnbull protested, still on the same note of aggressive violence. 'What I mean to say is that this feller seems to confoundedly well imagine . . .'

'Do for God's sake *shut up!*' Jervaise returned with a scowl.

'I suppose you think that I haven't any right . . .'

Turnbull began in a rather lower voice; and Brenda at last finding a chance to make herself heard, finished him by saying quickly,—

'Certainly you haven't; no right whatever to

come here—and *brawl . . .*' She spoke breathlessly, as though she were searching in the brief interlude of an exhausting struggle for some insult that would fatally wound and offend him. She tried to show him in a sentence that he was nothing more to her than a blundering, inessential fool, interfering in important business that was no concern of his. And although the hurry of her mind did not permit her to find the deadly phrase she desired, the sharpness of her anxiety to wound him was clear enough.

'Oh! of course, if you think that . . . ' he said, paused as if seeking for some threat of retaliation, and then flung himself, the picture of dudgeon, into a chair by the wall. He turned his back towards Brenda and glared steadfastly at his rival. I received the impression that the poor deluded boy was trying to revenge himself on Brenda. At the back of his mind he seemed still to regard her escapade as a foolish piece of bravado, undertaken chiefly to torture himself. His attitude was meant to convey that the joke had gone far enough, and that he would not stand much more of it.

For a time at least he was, fortunately, out of the piece. Perhaps he thought the influence of his attitude must presently take effect; that Brenda, whom he so habitually adored with his eyes, would be intimidated by his threat of being finally offended?

The three other protagonists took no more

J.C.

M

notice of the sulky Ronnie, but they could not at once recover any approach to sequence.

'I want to know why you've come up here,' Banks persisted.

'That's not the point,' Jervaise began in a tone that I thought was meant to be conciliatory.

'But it is—partly,' Brenda put in.

'My dear girl, do let's have the thing clear,' her brother returned, but she diverted his apparent intention of making a plain statement by an impatient,—

'Oh! it's all *clear* enough.'

'But it isn't, by any means,' Jervaise said.

'To us it is,' Banks added, meaning, I presume, that he and Brenda had no doubts as to their intentions.

'You're going to persist in the claim you made this morning?' Jervaise asked.

Banks smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

'Don't be silly, Frank,' Brenda interpreted. 'You must know that we can't do anything else.'

'It's foolish to say you *can't*,' he returned irritably, 'when so obviously you *can*.'

'Well, anyway, we're going to,' Banks affirmed with a slight inconsequence.

'And do you purpose to stay on here?' Jervaise said sharply, as if he were posing an insuperable objection.

'Not likely,' Banks replied. 'We're going to Canada, the whole lot of us.'

'Your father and mother, too?'

'Yes, if I can persuade 'em; and I can,' Banks said.

'You haven't tried yet?'

'No, I haven't.'

'Don't they know anything about this? Anything, I mean, before last night's affair?'

'Practically nothing at all,' Banks said. 'Of course, nothing whatever about last night.'

'And you honestly think . . . ' began Jervaise.

'That'll be all right, won't it, Anne?' Banks replied.

But Anne, still leaning back in the corner of the settle, refused to answer.

Jervaise turned and looked down at her. 'If you all went . . . ?' he said, giving his incomplete sentence the sound of a question.

'Oh! I should certainly go, too,' she replied.

Jervaise frowned moodily. I could see that he was caught in an awkward dilemma, but I was not absolutely sure as to the form it took. Had Anne made conditions? Her remark seemed, I thought, to hint a particular stipulation. Had she tried to coerce him with the threat of accompanying her brother to Canada unless the engagement to Brenda was openly sanctioned by the family?

'But you must see how impossible it is,' Jervaise said, still looking at Anne.

'We don't think so,' Brenda put in.

'You don't understand,' her brother returned savagely.

'You don't,' Brenda replied.

Jervaise snorted impatiently, but he had enough control of himself to avoid the snare of being drawn into a bickering match.

'It isn't as if the decision rested with me,' he went on, looking down at the hearth-rug, but still, I fancy, addressing himself almost exclusively to Anne. 'I can't make my father and mother see things as you do. No one could. Why can't you compromise?'

'Oh! *How?*' Brenda broke out with a fierce contempt.

'Agree to separate—for a time,' Jervaise said. 'Let Banks go to Canada and start a farm or something, and afterwards you could join him without any open scandal.'

'Any mortal thing to save a scandal, of course,' Brenda commented scornfully.

'Would *you* be prepared to do that?' Jervaise asked, turning to Banks.

I thought Banks seemed a trifle irresolute, as though the bribe of finally possessing Brenda was tempting enough to outweigh any other consideration. But he looked at her before replying, and her contemptuous shake of the head was completely decisive. He could not question any determination of hers.

'No, I wouldn't,' he said.

'But look here, Brenda, why . . . ' Jervaise began on a note of desperate reasonableness.

'Because I'm going out *with* him,' Brenda said. They might have chased that argument round for half an hour if Ronnie had not once more interposed.

His dudgeon had been slowly giving place to a shocked surprise. It was being borne in upon his reluctant mind that Brenda and Banks honestly intended to get married. And here was Frank Jervaise, for some mistaken purpose of his own, calmly admitting the possibility of the outrage, instead of scorning the bare idea of it with violence.

'I think you're making a ghastly mistake, Frank,' he said with a composure that was intended to be extremely ominous.

Jervaise clutched at the interruption, probably to give himself a little more time. The women were proving so unamenable to his excellent reasoning. One simply contradicted him, and the other refused to speak. 'What's a mistake, Ronnie?' he asked.

'Listening to them at all,' Turnbull said, with a preposterous attempt to be dignified. He would not look at Brenda as he continued, but he was certainly aware that she had turned towards him when he spoke, and the consciousness that she was watching him steadily increased his embarrassment. 'It's perfectly absurd, I mean, to talk as if you and your people would allow the thing to go on—under any circumstances—perfect rot! Why can't you say at once that it's got to stop—

absolutely, and—Good Lord!—I don't care what any one thinks—if I were in your place I'd jolly well sling Banks off the premises—I tell you I would——' he got to his feet, his vehemence was increasing, as if he would shout down Brenda's silent disdain—'I'd confoundedly well kick him out of the county . . . ' He looked almost equal to the task as he stood there roaring like a young bull-calf; but although he could have given his rival a good three stone in weight there was, I fancy, a difference in the quality of their muscles that might have left the final advantage with Banks in a rough-and-tumble engagement.

But despite, or perhaps on account of his complete ineptitude, I had a feeling of sympathy for Turnbull. It must have been very exasperating for him to stand there, roaring out his sincerest convictions and to be received by every one of us with a forbearing contempt.

Even Brenda expressed something of pity for him.

'My dear Ronnie, don't be absolutely idiotic,' she said, forbearingly, but rather as though she warned him that he had said quite enough.

He breathed heavily, resentfully, but still declined to look at her. 'Of course if you'd sooner I went away altogether . . . ' he remarked.

'I don't see that you can help us by staying,' Brenda said.

'I mean for good,' he explained tragically.

I heard afterwards that he had been in love with Brenda since she was nine years old, but I might have inferred the fact from his present attitude. He simply could not believe, as yet, that she would let him go—for good, as he said. No doubt she had tricked and plagued him so often in the past that the present situation seemed to him nothing more than the repetition of a familiar experience.

Brenda must have realised that, too; but, no doubt, she shrank from wounding him mortally in public. The ten years of familiar intercourse between her and Ronnie were not to be obliterated in a day, not even by the fury of her passion for Arthur Banks.

‘I know,’ she said. ‘But you *are* interrupting, Ronnie. Do go!’

‘And leave you here?’ He was suddenly encouraged again by her tone. He looked down at her, now; pleading like a great puppy, beseeching her to put a stop to this very painful game.

‘Surely, Ronnie, you must realise that I—mean it, this time,’ she said.

‘Not that you’re going to . . . going to Canada,’ he begged.

‘Yes. Yes. Definitely and absolutely finally yes,’ she said.

‘With—him?’

‘Yes.’

‘But, *Brenda*!’ The long-drawn appeal of her

name showed that the full bitterness of the truth was coming home to him at last.

'I'm sorry,' she said, and the sound of it was in some way painfully final.

'It isn't because . . . ' he began, but she anticipated his well-known reasons by saying,—

'It's nothing to do with you or with anything you've done, nothing whatever. I'm sorry, Ronnie, but it's Fate—just Fate. Do go, now. I'll see you again before—before we go.'

And still he stood for an instant undecided; and I could see the struggle that was going on in him, between the influence of Harrow and Oxford and those of the honest, simple primitive man. He knew that the right, conventional thing for him to do was to be magnanimous; to admit that he was the defeated lover, and to say something that would prove how splendid he could be in the moment of disaster. The traditions of Harrow, Oxford, and the melodrama united to give him an indication of the proper conduct of the situation, and against them was ranged nothing more than one feral impulse to take Banks by the throat and settle his blasphemous assumption of rivalry off-hand.

But it was, I think, a third influence that decided the struggle for that time. His glare of wrath at Banks had been followed by one last yearning look at Brenda, and some sentimental realisation of his loss rose and choked him, temporarily super-

seeding the powers both of make-believe and instinct. One lesson he had learnt at Harrow and Oxford so thoroughly that he re-acted to it even in this supreme crisis of his life. He might give expression to brutal passion, but in no circumstances whatever must he break down and weep in public.

He turned quickly and blundered out of the room with a stumbling eagerness to be alone that was extraordinarily pathetic.

'You'll admit, B., that it's cursedly hard lines on Ronnie after all these years,' Frank said with what sounded like genuine emotion.

She took that up at once. 'I know it is,' she said. 'It's going to be hard lines on lots of people, but there's no way out of it. You may think it's silly tosh to talk about Fate; but it *is* Fate.' And then she looked at Banks with something in her expression that was surely enough to compensate him for any pain or sacrifice he might have to endure for her.

'*We* can't help it, can we, Arthur?' she said.

He was too moved to answer. He set his lips tightly together and shook his head, gazing at her with a look of adoration and confidence that was almost violent in its protestation of love.

Jervaise turned round and leaned his forehead against the high mantelpiece. I looked out of the window. Anne remained hidden in the corner of the settle. We all, no doubt, had the same feeling that this love-affair was showing itself as something

too splendid to be interfered with. Whether or not it had the qualities that make for endurance, it had a present force that dwarfed every other emotion. Those two lovers ruled us by their perfect devotion to each other. I felt ashamed of my presence there, as if I had intruded upon some fervent religious ceremony. They were both so sincere, so gallant, and so proud.

It was Banks who re-started the conversation. The solitude we had permitted to the lovers was at once too little and too much for them. What had passed between them by an exchange of signals in the brief interval, I could only guess; they certainly had not spoken, but Banks's new subject suggested that they had somehow agreed to divert the interest momentarily from themselves.

'I've brought Mr Melhuish back with me,' he said. 'He's going to stay the night with us.' He may have been addressing Brenda in answer to some look of inquiry that had indicated my resolutely unconscious back.

Since Turnbull had gone, I was more than ever the outsider and intruder, and I was all too keenly aware of that fact as I turned back towards the room. My embarrassment was not relieved by the slightly perplexed astonishment the announcement had evoked in the faces of the two women.

'But I thought you were staying at the Hall,' Brenda said, looking at me with that air of suspicion to which I was rapidly growing accustomed.

'I was,' I said; 'but for reasons that your brother may be able to explain, I'm staying there no longer.'

She looked at Jervaise, then, but he had no reply ready. I had put him in a difficult position I had a chance to revenge myself at last.

'I don't understand, Frank,' Brenda prompted him; and Anne began to come to life for the first time since I had entered the room—there was a new effect of mischief about her, as if she had partly guessed the cause of my expulsion from the Hall.

'It's a long story,' Jervaise prevaricated.

'But one that I think you ought to tell,' I said, 'in justice to me.'

'We found that Melhuish had been, most unwarrantably, interfering in—in this affair of yours, B.,' he grumbled; 'and, in any case, it's no business of his.'

Brenda's dark eyebrows lifted with that expression of surprised questioning to which she could give such unusual effect. I suppose it emphasised that queer contrast—unique in my experience—between her naturally fair hair, and her black eyebrows and eyelashes. I have to emphasise the fact that the straw gold of her abundant vital hair was its *natural* colour. She had often, I believe, threatened to dye it, in order to avoid the charge of having already done so.

'What piffle!' she remarked. 'How has Mr Melhuish interfered? Why, this is the first time

I've seen him since last night at the dance. Besides,' she glanced at me with a half-whimsical touch of apology, 'I hardly know him.'

'Oh! it's some romantic rot of his, I suppose,' Jervaise returned sullenly. 'I never thought it was serious.'

'But,' Anne interposed, 'it sounds very serious . . . if Mr Melhuish has had to leave the Hall in the middle of his visit—and come to us.' I inferred that she was deliberately overlooking my presence in the room for some purpose of her own. She certainly spoke as if I were not present.

'Partly a misunderstanding,' Jervaise said. 'No reason why he shouldn't come back with me now if he wants to.'

'You would in that case explain, of course, how the misunderstanding arose?' I put in.

'I don't know what your game is,' he returned allusively.

'I never had one,' I said.

'Looked infernally suspicious,' was his grudging answer.

The two girls exchanged a look of understanding, but I had no notion what they intended by it. I had not learnt, then, how cleverly they played up to each other.

'Yes, but suspicious of what, Mr Jervaise?' Anne said, taking up the cross-examination

'Spying upon us,' Jervaise growled.

'Upon you or me?' asked Brenda.

'Both,' Jervaise said.

'But why?' asked Anne.

'Lord knows,' Jervaise replied.

I made no effort to interrupt them. The two girls were clearing my character for me by the simple obvious method that I had not had the wit to adopt for myself. I might have argued and protested for hours, and the only result would have been to confirm Jervaise's suspicions. Confronted by an innocent demand for explanation, he had not a leg to stand on.

Brenda's eyebrows went up again, with that slightly bizarre, exotic air which was so arresting. She spoke to me this time.

'And do you mean to say that they were all so horrid to you that you had to come away?' she asked.

'Precisely that,' I said.

'But you don't tell us what Mr Melhuish has *done!*' Anne persisted, continuing her cross-examination of Jervaise.

'Well, for one thing, he went out to meet your brother at three o'clock this morning,' he replied grudgingly.

'Didn't come out to meet me,' Banks put in. 'We did meet all right, but it was the first time we'd ever seen each other.'

We all four looked at Jervaise, awaiting his next piece of evidence with the expectant air of children watching a conjurer.

He began to lose his temper. 'I can't see that this has got anything to do with what we're discussing . . .' he said, but I had no intention of letting him off too easily. He had saved me the trouble of making tedious explanations, and my character had been cleared before Anne and Brenda, which two things were all that I really cared about in this connection; but I wanted, for other reasons, to make Jervaise appear foolish. So I interrupted him by saying,—

'Hadn't you better tell them about Miss Tattersall?'

He turned on me, quite savagely. 'What the devil has this affair of ours got to do with you, Melhuish?' he asked.

'Nothing whatever,' I said. 'You dragged me into it in the first instance by bringing me up here last night, but since then I haven't interfered one way or the other. What does affect me, however, is that you and your family have—well—insulted me, and for that you do owe me, at least, an explanation.'

'What made you come up here, now?' he asked with that glowering legal air of his; thrusting the question at me as if I must, now, be finally confuted.

'After you ran away from me in the avenue,' I said promptly, 'it seemed that the only thing left for me to do was to walk to Hurley Junction; but a quarter of a mile from the Park gate I found

your car drawn up by the side of the road. And as I had no sort of inclination to walk fourteen miles on a broiling afternoon, I decided to wait by the car until some one came to fetch it. And when presently Banks came, I tried my best to persuade him to take me to the station in it. He refused on the grounds that he wanted to take the car back at once to the garage; but when I explained my difficulty to him, his hospitable mind prompted him to offer me temporary refuge at the Home Farm. He brought me back to introduce me, and we found you here. Simple, isn't it?'

Jervaise scowled at the hearth-rug. 'All been a cursed misunderstanding from first to last,' he growled.

'But what was that about Grace Tattersall?' Brenda asked. 'If you'd accused *her* of spying, I could have understood it. She was trying to pump me for all she was worth yesterday afternoon.'

'I've admitted that there must have been some misunderstanding,' Jervaise said. 'For goodness' sake, let's drop this question of Melhuish's interference and settle the more important one of what we're going to do about—you.'

'I resent that word "interference,"' I put in.

'Oh! resent it, then,' Jervaise snarled.

'Really, I think Mr Melhuish is perfectly justified,' Brenda said. 'I feel horribly ashamed of

the way you've been treating him at home. I should never have thought that the mater . . .'

'Can't you understand that she's nearly off her head with worrying about you?' Jervaise interrupted.

'No, I can't,' Brenda returned. 'If it had been Olive, I could. But I should have thought they would all have been jolly glad to see the last of me. They've always given me that impression, anyhow.'

'Not in this way,' her brother grumbled.

'What do you mean by that exactly?' Anne asked with a great seriousness.

I think Jervaise was beginning to lose his nerve. He was balanced so dangerously between the anxiety to maintain the respectability of the Jervaises and his passion, or whatever it was, for Anne. Such, at least, was my inference; although how he could possibly reconcile his two devotions I could not imagine, unless his intentions with regard to Anne were frankly shameful. And Jervaise must, indeed, be an even grosser fool than I supposed him to be if he could believe for one instant that Anne was the sort of woman who would stoop to a common intrigue with him. For it could be nothing more than that. If they loved each other, they could do no less than follow the shining example of Brenda and Anne's brother. I could see Anne doing that, and with a still more daring spirit than the other couple had so far

displayed. I could not see her as Frank Jervaise's mistress. Moreover, I could not believe now, even after that morning's scene in the wood, that she really cared for him. If she did, she must have been an actress of genius, since, so far as I had been able to observe, her attitude towards him during the last half-hour had most nearly approached one of slightly amused contempt.

Jervaise's evident perplexity was notably aggravated by Anne's question.

'Well, naturally, my father and mother don't want an open scandal,' he said irritably.

'But why a scandal?' asked Anne. 'If Arthur and Brenda were married and went to Canada?'

'I don't say that *I* think it would be a scandal,' he said. 'I'm only telling you the way that *they'd* certainly see it. It might have been different if your brother had never been in our service. You must see that. *We* know, of course, but other people don't, and we shall never be able to explain to them. People like the Turnbulls and the Atkinsons and all that lot will say that Brenda eloped with the chauffeur. It's no good beating about the bush—that's the plain fact we've got to face.'

'Then, hadn't we better face it?' Anne returned with a flash of indignation. 'Or do you think you can persuade Arthur to go back to Canada, alone?'

Jervaise grunted uneasily.

'You know it's no earthly, Frank,' Brenda

said. 'Why can't you be a sport and go back and tell them that they might as well give in at once?'

'Oh! my dear girl, you must know perfectly well that they'll *never* give in,' her brother replied.

'Mr Jervaise might,' Banks put in.

Frank turned to him sharply. 'What do you mean by that?' he asked.

'He'd have given in this morning, if it hadn't been for you,' Banks said, staring with his most dogged expression at Jervaise.

'What makes you think so?' Jervaise retaliated.

'What he said, and the way he behaved,' Banks asserted, the English yeoman stock in him still very apparent.

'You're mistaken,' Jervaise snapped.

'Give me a chance to prove it, then,' was Banks's counter.

'How?'

'I've got to take that car back. Give me a chance for another talk with Mr Jervaise; alone this time.'

I looked at Banks with a sudden feeling of anxiety. I was afraid that he meant at last to use that 'pull' he had hinted at on the hill; and I had an intuitive shrinking from the idea of his doing that. This open defiance was fine and upright. The other attitude suggested to my mind the conception of something cowardly, a little base and underhand. He looked, I admit, the picture of sturdy virtue as he stood there challenging his late master to

permit this test of old Jervaise's attitude, but the prize at stake was so inestimably precious to Banks, that it must have altered all his values. He would, I am sure, have committed murder for Brenda—any sort of murder.

Frank Jervaise did not respond at once to the gage that had been offered. He appeared to be moodily weighing the probabilities before he decided his policy. And Brenda impatiently prompted him by saying,—

'Well, I don't see what possible objection you can have to that.'

'Only want to save the pater any worry I can,' Jervaise said. 'He has been more cut up than any one over this business.'

'The pater has?' queried Brenda on a note of amazement. 'I shouldn't have expected him to be half as bad as the mater and Olive.'

'Well, he is. He's worse—much worse,' Jervaise asserted.

I was listening to the others, but I was watching Banks, and I saw him sneer when that assertion was made. The expression seemed to have been forced out of him against his will; just a quick jerk downwards of the corners of his mouth that portrayed a supreme contempt for old Jervaise's distress. But that sneer revealed Banks's opinion to me better than anything he had said or done. I knew then that he was aware of something concerning the master of the Hall that was probably

unknown either to Brenda or Frank, something that Banks had loyally hidden even from his sister. He covered his sneer so quickly that I believe no one else noticed it.

'But, surely, it would be better for the pater to see Arthur and have done with it,' Brenda was saying.

'Oh! I dare say,' Jervaise agreed with his usual air of grudging the least concession. 'Are you ready to go now?' he asked, addressing Banks.

Banks nodded. 'I'll pick up the car on the way,' he said.

'I'll come with you—as far as the car,' Brenda said, and the pair of them went out together.

Jervaise stretched himself with a self-conscious air. 'It will take him the best part of an hour getting the car into the garage and all that,' he remarked, looking at me.

I could see, of course, that he wanted me to go; his hint had been, indeed, almost indecently pointed; and I had no wish to intrude myself upon them, if Anne's desire coincided with his. I got to my feet and stood like an awkward dummy trying to frame some excuse for leaving the room. I could think of nothing that was not absurdly obvious. I was on the point of trying to save the last remnant of my dignity by walking out, when Anne relieved my embarrassment. I knew that she had been watching me, but I was afraid to look at her. I cannot say why, exactly, but I

felt that if I looked at her just then I should give myself away before Jervaise.

'I must go and see about Mr Melhuish's room,' she said.

She was half-way to the door when Jervaise stopped her.

'I should rather like to speak to you for a minute first,' he remarked, and scowled again at me.

'There's nothing more to be said until Arthur has seen Mr Jervaise,' Anne replied, as though any subject other than the affair Brenda, could not conceivably be of interest to her.

'It wasn't about them,' Jervaise said awkwardly.

'What was it, then?' Anne asked. I dared to look at her, now, and her face was perfectly serious as she added, 'Was it about the milk, or eggs, or anything?'

Without doubt there was a delicious strain of minx in her!

Jervaise lost his temper. I believe that if I had offered to fight him, then, he would have welcomed the opportunity.

'Oh! you know what I want to say,' he snorted.

'Then why not say it?' Anne replied.

He turned savagely upon me. 'Haven't you got the common sense . . .' he began, but Anne cut him short.

'Oh! we don't suspect *our* guests of spying,' she said.

I was nearly sorry for Jervaise at that moment.

He could not have looked any more vindictive than he looked already, but he positively trembled with anger. He could not endure to be thwarted. Nevertheless, he displayed a certain measure of self-control.

'Very well,' he said as calmly as he could. 'If you're going to take that tone . . .'

'Yes?' Anne prompted him. She showed no sign of being in any way disconcerted.

'It will hardly help your brother,' he concluded.

'I made a mistake in trying to help him this morning,' she said. 'I shan't make the same mistake twice in one day.'

He evidently knew what she meant, although I did not. His heavy eyebrows twitched, and then, with a half-contemptuous shrug of his shoulders he strode out of the room with an air of leaving us to the doom we so justly deserved.

'The worst of it is that the second mistake doesn't cancel the first,' Anne remarked thoughtfully.

XI

THE STORY

SHE still stood by the great oak table, her hands resting lightly on its dark polished surface. I could see the vague reflection of her fingers reaching up through the deep solidity of the oak to join hands with her. She produced, I thought, an impressive effect of fragility and power in her contrast with that massive table. The material of her flesh was so delicate compared to the inert, formidable mass before her. She could not have lifted or moved it by her own effort. And yet it seemed that she had absolute command over that ponderous obstacle, that in some way the mobility of her spirit must give her control of it, that she might, if she wished, plunge those relatively fragile hands of hers deep into the lake of that dark and adamant surface.

She had not looked at me since Jervaise left the room, and when she spoke again she gazed with a kind of concentrated abstraction out of the window at the quiet glory of the calm August evening. Nevertheless her speech showed that all her attention was being given to the human interests that had just been absorbing us.

'Are you really a friend of ours?' she asked, 'or did you just come here *faute de mieux*?' The little French phrase came like an unexpected jewel, as if she had relapsed unconsciously into a more familiar language.

I was strangely confused by the fact of our being alone together. I had an entirely unwarranted feeling that we were about to make up a quarrel. And I wanted to do my utmost to produce the best possible impression upon her.

'I hope I may call myself your brother's friend,' I began lamely. 'All my sympathies are with him.'

'You don't know the Jervaises particularly well?' she inquired. For one moment she glanced down at her poised hands, but almost instantly returned to her rather absent-minded gazing through the open window.

'Except for Frank and his brother, I never met one of them until last night,' I explained. 'I was at school and Cambridge with Frank.'

'But they are your sort, your class,' she said. 'Don't you agree with them that it's a dreadful thing for Arthur, their chauffeur—and he was in the stables once, years ago—to try to run away with *their* daughter?'

'All my sympathies are with Arthur,' I repeated.

'Not because the Jervaises were so rude to you?' she asked.

'I liked him before that; when we met on the

hill, very early this morning,' I said. 'But, perhaps, he didn't tell you.'

'Yes, he told me,' she said. 'And was that the beginning of all the trouble between you and the Jervaises?'

'In a way, it was,' I agreed. 'But it's an involved story and very silly. I admit that they had grounds for suspecting that I had interfered.'

'Mrs Jervaise and Olive are always suspecting people,' she volunteered. 'I've often wondered why?'

'Like that, by nature,' I suggested.

'Perhaps,' she said carelessly as if she did not care to pursue that speculation. 'You know that my mother was governess to Olive and Frank before she married my father?' she continued, still with that same air of discussing some remote, detached topic.

'I heard that she had been a governess. I didn't know that she had ever been with the Jervaises,' I said.

'She was there for over two years,' pursued Anne. 'She is French, you know, though you'd probably never guess it, now, except for an occasional word here and there. She left years before Brenda was born. Brenda is so much younger than the others. There's eight years between her and Robert, the next one. Olive's the eldest, of course, and then Frank.'

I made some conventional acknowledgment

for this information. I was wondering if she were merely talking to save the embarrassment of silence. We had drifted, apparently, a long way from any matter of personal interest and I was hesitating as to whether I should not attempt a new opening, when she began again with the least little frown of determination.

'I'm talking about them, because if you are to be Arthur's friend you ought to know more or less how things are between us and the Jervaises, and I might just as well say right out at once that we don't like them; we've never liked them. Mother, more particularly. She has got something against them that she has never told us, but it isn't that.' Her frown was more pronounced as she went on. 'They aren't nice people, any of them, except Brenda, and she's so absolutely different from the rest of them, and doesn't like them either—in a way.'

'You don't even except Frank?' I mumbled. I could not resist the opportunity she had offered to ask that too pointed question; but I looked down at the floor as I spoke; I wanted her to understand that I was not cross-examining her.

'I knew you saw us,' she returned in the same even tone that she had used all through this conversation of ours. She had not once raised or lowered her voice. She might have been speaking a part, just to test her memory.

'Yes, I did,' I said. 'Quite by accident, of

course. I had no idea that he had come up here. I hadn't seen him since breakfast.'

'It was a mistake,' she said simply.

I looked up at her, hoping with no shadow of reason that I might have played some part in her discovery that that caress in the wood had been a mistake. But she had not changed colour nor moved her attitude, and her voice was still free from any emotion as she said,—

'We thought, Brenda and I thought, that we might trick him. It was a piece of chicane. She and I were rather silly this morning. We excite each other. In a sort of way she dared me. But I was sorry afterwards and so was Brenda, although she thought it might be better as I'd gone so far to keep it up until Arthur had got a promise or something out of Mr Jervaise. I had meant to do that. I don't know why I didn't.'

'But do you think that Frank Jervaise realises that you were only playing with him for your own ends, this morning?' I asked.

'Oh! yes,' she said with perfect assurance. 'As a matter of fact, he was very suspicious this morning. He's like his mother and sister in suspecting everybody.'

'Do you think he'll make trouble?' I said. 'Now? Up at the Hall?'

'Yes, I do. He's vindictive,' she replied. 'That's one reason why I'm glad you are with us, now. It might help—though I don't quite see how.

Perhaps it's just the feeling of having some one else on our side. Because I'm afraid that there's going to be a lot of trouble when my father and mother come home. With my father, more particularly. He'll be afraid of being turned out. It will be very difficult to make him take up a new idea. He'll hate the thought of leaving here and starting all over again in Canada. He loves this place so.'

'And I suppose he likes, or at least respects, the Jervaises?' I said.

'Not much,' she replied. 'They've made it very difficult for us in many ways.'

'Deliberately?' I suggested.

'They don't care,' she said, warming a little for the first time. 'They simply don't think of any one but themselves. For instance, it mayn't seem much to you, but it's part of our agreement with Mr Jervaise to provide the Hall with dairy when they're at home—at market prices, of course. And then they'll go to town for two or three months in the summer and take a lot of the servants with them, and we're left to find a market for our dairy as best we can, just when milk is most plentiful.' She lifted her hands for a moment in a graceful French gesture as she added, 'Often it means just giving milk away.'

'Does your father complain about that?' I asked.

She turned and looked at me with a complete

change of expression. Her abstraction had vanished, giving place to an air that confessed a deliberate caprice.

'To *us*,' she said with a laugh that delightfully indulged her father's weakness.

I needed nothing more to illuminate the relations of the Banks family. With that single gesture she had portrayed her father's character, and her own and her mother's smiling consideration for him. Nevertheless I was still interested in his attitude towards the Hall—with Anne as interpreter. I knew that I should get a version noticeably different from the one her brother had given me on the hill that morning.

'But you said that your father hadn't much *respect* for the Jervaises?' I stipulated.

'Not for the Jervaises as individuals,' she amended, 'but he has for the Family. And they aren't so much a family to him as an Idea, an Institution, a sort of Religion. Nothing would break him of that, nothing the Jervaises themselves ever could do. He'd be much more likely to lose his faith in God than in the Rights of the Hall. That's one of his sayings. He says they have rights, as if there was no getting over that. It's just like people used to believe in the divine right of kings.'

I do not know whether I was more fascinated by her theme or by her exposition of it. 'Then, how is it that the rest of you . . .?' I began, but she had not the patience to wait while I finished

the question. She was suddenly eager, vivid, astonishingly alive; a different woman from the Anne who had spoken as if in her sleep, while plunged in some immense, engrossing meditation.

'My mother,' she broke in. 'The Jervaises mean nothing to her, nothing of that sort. She wasn't brought up on it. It isn't in her blood. In a way she's as good as they are. Her grandfather was an emigré from the Revolution—not titled except just for the "de," you know—they had an estate near Rouen . . . but all this doesn't interest you.'

'It does, profoundly,' I said.

She looked at me with a spice of mischief in her eyes. 'Why?' she asked.

It was a tempting opening for a flirtation, but I could not flirt with her. When I had first heard the clear, soft tones of her voice at the window, I must have known that my meeting with her was a new and decisive experience. I had always idealised a certain type of woman, and perhaps for that reason I had always held back from the possible disillusion of an exploring intimacy. But my recognition of Anne had nothing in common with all my old deliberately romantic searchings for a theoretical affinity. If I had been asked at any time before two o'clock that morning to define my ideal, the definition would not have described Anne. Indeed, I could never have imagined her. She was altogether too individual, too positive,

too independently real, to fit the mawkish vapourings of a man's imaginary woman. There was something about her that conquered me. Already I was blushing ashamed of my jealous suspicion that she could sell herself by a marriage with Jervaise. In all her moods, she appeared to me with an affect that I can only describe as 'convincing.' She was a perpetual revelation, and each new phase of her thrilled me with admiration, and a sense of long-sought satisfaction. I could be content to watch and to listen to her. The revelations of her personality were to me as a continual and glorious adventure. To flirt with her would be a confession on my part of a kind of superiority that I could never feel; a suggestion of the ridiculous assumption that I could afford to dally with and in certain circumstances flout her. I could sooner have dallied with and flouted a supreme work of art. Wherefore when she challenged me with her daring 'Why?' I met her eyes with a look that if it in any way represented what I was feeling, must have expressed a grave and sincere humility.

'I can hardly tell you why,' I said. 'I can only assure you that I am profoundly interested.'

She accepted that statement with a readiness that gave me another thrill of satisfaction. She understood my desire and gave way to it, instantly fulfilling my present need of her.

'My great-grandfather went back to Paris after

things had settled down,' she went on, as if there had been no break in her narrative; 'just as a common workman. He was about thirty-five, then, I believe; his first wife and his two children had died of small-pox in Holland, and he didn't marry again until he was sixty. He had only one child afterwards; that was my grandmother. But I can't tell you the story properly. You must get my mother to do that. She makes such a lovely romance out of it. And it *is* rather romantic, too, isn't it? I like to feel that I've got that behind me rather than all the stodgy old ancestors the Jervaises have got. Wouldn't you?'

'Rather,' I agreed warmly.

'If I didn't miss all the important points you'd think so,' Anne replied with a little childish pucker of perplexity coming in her forehead. 'But story-telling isn't a bit in my line. I wish it were. I can listen to mother for hours, and I can never make out quite what it is she does to make her stories so interesting. Of course she generally tells them in French, which helps, but I'm no better in French than in English. Mother has a way of saying "Enfin" or "En effet" that in itself is quite thrilling.'

'You don't know quite how well you do it yourself,' I said.

She shook her head. 'Not like mother,' she asserted. With that childish pucker still wrinkling her forehead she looked like a little girl of fourteen.

I could see her gazing up at her mother with some little halting perplexed question. I felt as if she were giving me some almost miraculous confidence, obliterating all the strangeness of new acquaintanceship by displaying the story of her girlhood.

'She puts mystery into it, too,' she went on, still intent on the difference between her own and her mother's methods. 'And, I think, there really is some mystery that she's never told us,' she added as an afterthought. 'After my grandfather died, her mother married again, a widower with one little girl, and when she grew up mother got her over here as a sort of finishing governess to Olive Jervaise. She came a year or two before Brenda was born. She was born in Italy. Did you know that? I always wonder whether that's why she's so absolutely different from all the others.'

'She certainly is. I don't know whether that's enough to explain it,' I commented. 'And did your mother's step-sister go abroad with them?'

'I believe so. She never came back here afterwards. She has been dead for ages, now. But mother's always rather mysterious about her. That's how I began, wasn't it? I know that she was very beautiful, and sometimes I think I can just remember her. I must have been about four when she left here, because I'm rather more than four years older than Brenda.'

The thought of Anne at four was not less fascinating to me than the picture of her at fourteen.

I was jealous of all her twenty-three years of life. I wanted to have an intimate knowledge of all her past being; of every least change and development that she had suffered since babyhood.

But I was to have no more confidences of that sort just then. The child disappeared from her face and speech as quickly as it had come. She appeared to be dreaming, again, as she continued almost without a pause,—

‘But it isn’t my mother I’m sorry for in this affair. She’ll arrange herself. I think she’ll be glad, in a way. We all should if it weren’t for my father. We’re so ruled by the Jervaises here. And it’s worse than that. Their—their prestige sort of hangs over you everywhere. It’s like being at the court of Louis Quatorzé. The estate is theirs and they are the estate. Mother often says we are still féodal down here. It seems to me sometimes that we’re little better than slaves.

I smiled at the grotesqueness of the idea. It was impossible to conceive Anne as a slave.

She was still gazing out of the window with that appearance of abstraction, but she was evidently aware of my smile, for she said,—

‘You think that’s absurd, do you?’

‘In connection with you,’ I replied. ‘I can’t see you as any one’s slave.’

She gave me her attention again. ‘No, I couldn’t be,’ she threw at me with a hint of defiance; and before I had time to reply, continued, ‘I was angry

with Arthur for coming back. To go into service ! I almost quarrelled with mother over that. She was so weak about it. She hated his being so far away. She didn't seem to mind anything as long as she could get him home again. But Arthur's more like my father. He's got a strain of Jervaise-worship in him, somewhere.'

'A very strong strain, just now,' I suggested.

She laughed. 'Yes, he's Brenda's slave ; always will be,' she said. 'But I don't count her as a Jervaise. She's an insurgée like me—against her own family. She'd do anything to get away from them.'

'Well, she will now,' I said, 'and your brother, too.'

That seemed to annoy her. 'It may sound easy enough to you,' she said, 'but it's going to be anything but easy. You can't possibly understand how difficult it's going to be.'

'Can't you tell me?' I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders as if she had suddenly become tired of my questions, perhaps of myself, also.

'You're so outside it all,' she said.

'I know I am,' I admitted. 'But—I don't want to remain outside.'

'I don't know why I've been telling you as much as I have,' she returned.

'I can only plead my profound interest,' I said.

'In Arthur? Or in us, generally?' she inquired

and frowned as if she forbade me to say that my chief interest might be in herself.

'In all of you and in the situation,' I tried, hoping to please her. 'I was prepared to dislike the Jervaises and all they stood for, before this talk with you. Now . . .'

'But you're well off, aren't you?' she said with a faint air of contempt. 'You can't be an insurgé. You'd be playing against your own side.'

'If you think that, why did you give me so much confidence to begin with?' I retaliated.

'Oh! I'm always doing silly things,' she said. 'It was silly to play with that foolish Jervaise man this morning. It was silly to offend him this evening. I don't—*think*. I ought to be whipped.' She had apparently forgotten her recent distrust of me, for she continued in the tone of one who makes an ultimate confession. 'As a matter of fact, I suppose I'm chiefly responsible for the whole thing. I egged them on. Arthur would have gone on adoring Brenda as a kind of divinity for ever, if I hadn't brought them together. He's afraid to touch her, even now. I just didn't think. I never do till it's too late.'

'But you're not sorry—about them, are you?' I put in.

'I'm sorry for my father,' she said. 'Oh! I'm terribly sorry for him.' Her eyes were extraordinarily tender and compassionate as she spoke. I felt that if any lover of Anne's could ever inspire such

devotion as showed in her face at that moment, he would indeed be blest.

'He's sixty,' she went on in a low, brooding voice, 'and he's—he's so—rooted.'

'Is there no chance of their letting you stay on, if Arthur and Brenda went to Canada?' I asked.

Her face was suddenly hard again as she replied. 'I don't think there's one chance in a million,' she said. 'The Jervaise prestige couldn't stand such relations as us, living at their very doors. Besides, I know I've upset that horrid Jervaise man. He'll be revengeful. He's so weak, and that sort are always vindictive. He'll be mean and spiteful. Oh! no, it's one of two things, either Arthur will have to go back to Canada without Brenda, or we'll all have to go together.'

Her tone and attitude convinced me. If I had been able to consider the case logically and without prejudice, I should probably have scorned this presentation of rigid alternatives as the invention of a romantic mind; I might have recognised in it the familiar device of the dramatist. But I had so far surrendered myself to the charm of Anne's individuality that I accepted her statement without the least shadow of criticism. It was the search to find some mechanical means of influencing the Jervaise's decision that reminded me of Arthur Banks's hint of an advantage that he might use in a last emergency.

'But your brother told me last night,' I said,

'that there was some—"pull" or other he had, that might make a difference if it came to desperate measures.'

'He didn't tell you what it was?' she asked, and I knew at once that she was, after all, in her brother's confidence.

'No, he gave me no idea,' I replied.

'He couldn't ever use that,' she said decidedly. 'He told me about it this morning, before he went up to the Hall, and I——'

'Dissuaded him?' I suggested, as she paused.

'No! He saw it, himself,' she explained. 'It wasn't like Arthur—to think of such a thing, even—at ordinary times. But after his quarrel with Brenda on the hill—if you could call it a quarrel, when, so far as I can make out, Arthur never said a word the whole time—after that, and Brenda being so eager to face them all out, this morning; he got a little beyond himself.'

'Does Brenda know about this—pull?' I asked.

'Of course not!' Anne replied indignantly. 'How could we tell her that?'

'I haven't the least notion what it is, you see,' I apologised.

'Oh! it's about old Mr Jervaise,' Anne explained without the least show of reluctance. 'There's some woman or other he goes to see in town. And once or twice Arthur took him in the car. They forget we're human beings at all, sometimes, you know. They think we're just servants and don't

notice things; or if we do notice them, that we shouldn't be so disrespectful as to say anything. I don't know what they think. Anyhow, he let Arthur drive him—twice, I believe it was—and the second time Arthur looked at him when he came out of the house, and Mr Jervaise must have known that Arthur guessed. Nothing was said, of course, but he didn't ever take Arthur again; but Arthur knows the woman's name and address. It was in some flats, and the porter told him something, too.'

I realised that I had wasted my sympathy on old Jervaise. His air of a criminal awaiting arrest had been more truly indicative than I could have imagined possible. He had been expecting blackmail; had probably been willing to pay almost any price to avoid the scandal. I wondered how far the morning interview had relieved his mind?

'That explains Mr Jervaise's state of nerves this morning,' I remarked. 'I could see that he was frightfully upset, but I thought it was about Brenda. I had an idea that he might be very devoted to her.'

Anne pushed that aside with a gesture, as quite unworthy of comment.

'But, surely, that really does give your brother some kind of advantage,' I went on thoughtlessly. I suppose that I was too intent on keeping Anne in England to understand exactly what my speech implied.

She looked at me with a superb scorn. 'You don't mean to say,' she said, 'that you think we'd take advantage of a thing like that? Father—or any of us?'

I had almost the same sense of being unjustly in disgrace that I had had during the Hall luncheon party. I do not quite know what made me grasp at the hint of an omission from her bravely delivered 'any of us.' I was probably snatching at any straw.

'Your mother would feel like that, too?' I dared in my extremity.

Any ordinary person would have parried that question by a semblance of indignation or by asking what I meant by it. Anne made no attempt to disguise the fact that the question had been justified. Her scorn gave way to a look of perplexity; and when she spoke she was staring out of the window again, as if she sought the spirit of ultimate truth on some, to me, invisible horizon.

'She isn't practical,' was Anne's excuse for her mother. 'She's so—so romantic.'

'I'm afraid I was being unpractical and romantic, too,' I apologised, rejoicing in my ability to make use of the precedent.

Anne just perceptibly pursed her lips, and her eyes turned towards me with the beginning of a smile.

'You little thought what a romance you were coming into when you accepted the invitation for that week-end—did you?' she asked.

'My goodness!' was all the comment I could find; but I put a world of feeling into it.

'And I very nearly refused,' I went on, with the excitement of one who makes a thrilling announcement.

Anne humoured my eagerness with a tolerant smile. '*Did* you?' she said encouragingly.

'It was the merest chance that I accepted,' I replied. 'I was curious about the Jervaise family.'

'Satisfied?' Anne asked.

'Well, I've been given an opportunity of knowing them from the inside,' I said.

'You'll be writing a play about us,' Anne remarked carelessly.

I was astonished to find that she knew I had written plays. 'How did you know that I did that sort of thing?' I asked.

'I've seen one of them,' she said. '*The Mulberry Bush*'; when mother and I were in London last winter. And Arthur said you were the same Mr Melhuish. I suppose Frank Jervaise had told him.'

'People who go to the theatre don't generally notice the name of the author,' I commented.

'I do,' she said. 'I'm interested in the theatre. I've read dozens of plays, in French, mostly. I don't think the English comedies are nearly so well done. Of course, the French have only one subject, but they are so much more witty. Have you ever read *Les Hanneçons*, for instance?'

'No. I've seen the English version on the stage,' I said.

I was ashamed of having written *The Mulberry Bush*, of having presumed to write any comedy. I felt the justice of her implied criticism. Indeed, all my efforts seemed to me, just then, as being worthless and insincere. All my life, even. There was something definite and keen about this girl of twenty-three that suddenly illuminated my intellectual and moral flabbiness. She had already a definite attitude towards social questions that I had never bothered to investigate. She had shown herself to have a final pride in the matter of black-mailing old Jervaise. And in half a dozen words she had exposed the lack of real wit in my attempts at playwriting. I was humbled before her superior intelligence. Her speech had still a faint flavour of the uneducated, but her judgments were brilliantly incisive; despite her inferentially limited experience, she had a clearer sight of humanity than I had.

'You needn't look so depressed,' she remarked.

'I was thinking what a pity it is that you should go to Canada,' I returned.

'I want to go,' she said. 'I want to feel free and independent; not a chattel of the Jervaises.'

'But—Canada!' I remonstrated.

'You see,' she said, 'I could never leave my father and mother. Wherever they go, I must go, too. They've no one but me to look after them.'

And this does, at last, seem, in a way, a chance. Only, I can't trust myself. I'm too impulsive about things like this. Oh! do you think it might kill my father if he were torn up by the roots? Sometimes I think it might be good for him, and at others I'm horribly afraid.'

'Well, of course, I've never seen him . . .'
I began.

'And in any case, you're prejudiced,' she interrupted me. Her tone had changed again; it was suddenly light, almost coquettish, and she looked at me with a challenging lift of her eyebrows, as if, most astonishingly, she had read my secret adoration of her and defied me to acknowledge it.

'In what way am I prejudiced?' I asked.

'Hush! here's Brenda coming back,' she said.

I regretted extremely that Brenda should have returned at that moment, but I was tremendously encouraged. Anne seemed in that one sentence to have sanctioned the understanding that I was in love with her. Her warning of the interruption seemed to carry some unspoken promise that I should be given another opportunity.

XII

CONVERSION

ANNE had not once moved from her original place by the table in the course of that long conversation of ours, and she still stood there, her finger-tips resting on the oak with a powerful effect of poise when Brenda came into the room. Brenda's actions were far more vivacious than her friend's. She came in with an air of youthful exuberance, looked at me with a shade of inquiry, and then sat down opposite Anne.

'I came back over the hill and through the wood,' she said, resting her elbows on the table and her chin on her hands. 'It's a topping evening. Poor Arthur; I wish I could have gone with him. I offered to, but he didn't want me to come. I'm not sure he didn't think they might kidnap me if I went too near.' She turned to me with a bright smile as she added, '*Could* they keep me, Mr Melhuish; shut me up or something?'

'I'm not quite sure about that,' I said, 'but they could arrest — Arthur' — (I could not call him anything else, I found) — 'if he ran away with you. On a charge of abduction, you know.'

'They could make it pretty nasty for us all round, in fact,' Brenda concluded.

'I'm afraid they could,' I agreed.

She was looking extraordinarily pretty. The bizarre contrast between her dark eyelashes and her fair hair seemed to find some kind of echo in the combination of health and fragility that she expressed in her movements. She appeared at once vital and delicate without being too highly-strung. I could well understand how the bucolic strain in Arthur Banks was prostrate with admiration before such a rare and exciting beauty.

By the side of Brenda, Anne looked physically robust. The developed lines of her figure emphasised Brenda's fragility. And yet Anne's eyes, her whole pose, expressed a spirituality that Brenda lacked. Anne, with her amazing changes of mood, her rapid response to emotion, gave expression to some spirit not less feminine than Brenda's, but infinitely deeper. Behind the moving shadows and sunlight of her impulses there lay always some reminder of a constant orientation. She might trifle brilliantly with the surface of life, but her soul was more steadfast than a star. Brenda might love passionately, but her love would be relatively personal, selfish. When Anne gave herself, she would love like a mother, with her whole being.

I came out of my day-dream to find that she was speaking of me.

'Mr Melhuish is half asleep,' she was saying.

'And I haven't got his room ready after all this time.'

'He didn't get much sleep last night,' Brenda replied. 'We none of us did for that matter. We were wandering round the Park and just missing each other like the people in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.'

'Come and help me to get that room ready,' Anne said. 'Father and mother may be home any minute. They ought to have been back before.'

Brenda was on her feet in a moment. She appeared glad to have some excuse for action. She was, no doubt, nervous and excited as to the probable result of her lover's mission to the Hall, and wanted to be alone with Anne in order that they might speculate upon those probabilities which Banks's return would presently transform into certainties.

Anne turned to me before they left the room and indicated three shelves of books half hidden behind the settle. 'You might find something to read there, unless you'd sooner have a nap,' she said. 'We shan't be having supper until eight.'

I preferred, however, to go out and make my own estimate of probabilities in the serenity of the August evening. My mind was too full to read. I wanted to examine my own ideas just then, not those of some other man or woman.

'I'm going for a walk,' I said to Anne. 'I want to think.' And I looked at her with a greater boldness than I had dared hitherto. I claimed

a further recognition of that understanding she had, as I believed, so recently admitted.

'To think out that play?' she returned lightly, but her expression did not accord with her tone. She had paused at the door, and as she looked back at me, there was a suggestion of sadness in her face, of regret, or it might even have been of remorse. She looked, I thought, as though she were sorry for me.

She was gone before I could speak again.

I found my way out by the back door through which Jervaise and I had entered all those incalculable hours ago; and I looked up at the window from which Anne's beautiful voice had hailed me out of the night. I wanted to think about her, to recall how she had looked and spoken—at that window; in the course of her talk with Frank Jervaise; in the recent scene in the farm sitting-room when she had ambushed herself so persistently behind the ear of the settle; and, most of all, I desired to weigh every tone and expression I could remember in that last long conversation of ours; every least gesture or attention that might give me a hope of having won, in some degree, her regard or interest.

But the perplexing initiative of my intelligence would not, for some reason, permit me to concentrate my thoughts on her at that moment. My mind was bewilderingly full of Anne, but I could

not think of her. When I fell into the pose of gazing up at her window, the association suggested not the memory I desired, but the picture of Frank Jervaise fumbling in the darkness of the porch, and the excruciating anguish of Racquet's bark. From that I fell to wondering why I had not seen Racquet on this occasion of my second visit? I had not remembered him until then.

I pulled myself up with an effort, and finding the surroundings of the yard so ineffectual as a stimulus, I wandered down the hill towards the wood. I suggested to myself that I might meet Banks returning from the Hall, but my chief hope was that I might revive the romance of the night.

The sun was setting clear and red, a different portent from the veiled thing that had finally hidden itself in a huddle of purple and gray cloud the night before. I had seen it from my bedroom at the Hall as I dressed for dinner and had mildly regretted the threat of possible bad weather. I had been a little bored by the anticipations I had formed of my week-end. The Jervaises, from what I had seen of them, promised, I thought, to be uncommonly dull. I had not seen Brenda before dinner.

I roused myself again and made an effort to shift the depression that was settling upon me, but the mood was not to be exorcised by any deliberate attempt to revive the glow of adventure that had warmed my earlier excursions through

the wood. The very stillness of the evening, the air of preparation for repose, the first faint suggestions of the passage from summer to autumn, all had some effect of pervading melancholy. I found myself speculating on the promise of change that my talk with Anne had foreshadowed; of the uprooting of Farmer Banks, of the family's emigration, and the sadness of their farewells to this exquisitely peaceful country of England.

And then the thought that I had unconsciously feared and repressed since I had left the farm, broke through all these artificial abstractions and forced itself upon my attention. I struggled against it vainly for a few seconds and then braced myself to meet the realisation of my own failure. For it was that shadow which had been stalking me since Anne had so obliquely criticised my comedy. And it seemed to me now that her last strange expression as she left the room, that look of pity and regret, had all too surely indicated the certainty that she—I faced it with a kind of bitter despair—that she despised me. I was 'well-off.' I belonged to the Jervaises' class. She had flung those charges at me contemptuously before she had finally dismissed my one futile claim to distinction by classing me among the writers of that artificial English comedy which had not even the redeeming virtue of wit.

Not once in that long conversation with her had she shown the sudden spark of recognition

that had so wonderfully lighted my parting with her in the night. She had given me her confidence about her family affairs because she counted me as a new ally, however ineffective, coming in unexpectedly to fight against the Jervaises. She had acknowledged my worship of her because she was too clear-sighted and too honest to shirk my inevitable declaration. But I could not doubt that she rated me as unworthy of her serious attention. Her whole attitude proclaimed that her one instant of reaching out towards me had been a mistake; one of the many impulses that continually blossomed and died in her close intercourse with the spirit of life.

And I could not blame her for her contempt of me. I despised myself. I was a man without a serious interest. I had escaped vice, but I had always lived among surface activities. My highest ambition after I left Cambridge had been to have one of my foolish plays mounted in a West-End theatre. I had wanted to be talked about, to be a social success. And I had achieved that ambition without much difficulty. I had had an independent income—left me by my father who had died when I was in my second year at Jesus—only three hundred a year, but enough for me to live upon without working. I had gone often to the theatre in those days, and had scraped up an acquaintance with a middle-aged actor, whose chief occupation had been the stage-managing of new productions.

With his help I had studied stage-craft by attending rehearsals, the best possible school for a would-be dramatist. And my first accepted play had been written in collaboration with him. It had not been a great success, but I had gained invaluable experience, and, after that, success had come to me rapidly and easily. I found that I had the knack of writing pleasant little artificial comedies. None of them had run for longer than eight months, and I had only written five in all, but they had made me comparatively rich. At that time my investments alone were bringing me in nearly two thousand a year.

I was thirty-two, now, and it seemed to me looking back, that I had never had one worthy ambition in all those years. I had never even been seriously in love. Most deplorable of all I had never looked forward to a future that promised anything but repetitions of the same success.

What had I to live for? I saw before me a life of idleness with no decent occupation, no objects, but the amassing of more money, the seeking of a wider circle of acquaintances, dinner-parties at more select houses, an increasing reputation as a deviser of workmanlike, tolerably amusing plays. If I had had vices, such as a promiscuous love of women, I might have found the anticipation of such a future more tolerable. There might then have been some incitement to new living, new experience. But I had nothing.

Yet until that evening in the wood I had hardly paused to consider what would presently become of me. The gradual increase in my scale of personal luxury had brought sufficient diversion and satisfaction. I had lived in the pleasures of the moment, and had only rarely been conscious that those pleasures were growing stale; that the crust of life upon which I had so diligently crawled, was everywhere and always the same.

Now it was as if that monotonous surface had amazingly split. My crawling was paralysed and changed to a terrified stillness. I had paused, horrified, at the mouth of a pit, and gazed down with a sick loathing at the foundations of my life that had been so miraculously revealed. I did, indeed, stand suddenly stock still in the wood, and staring down the darkening vista of the path, saw not the entranced twilight that was sinking the path in a pool of olive green shadows, but a kind of bioscopic presentation of my own futile, monotonous existence.

If Anne would have nothing to do with me, what, I asked myself, did the world hold that could conceivably make my life worth living?

I suppose most men and women have asked themselves the same question when they have been unexpectedly stirred by a great love. The sense of unworthiness comes with a shock of surprise that seems violently to tear open the comfortable cloak of self-satisfaction. I had been content

with my life, even a little vain of my achievement, until that last conversation with Anne; now I loathed the thought of my own inefficiency and all my prospects of success appeared unendurably tame. I was in the spiritual state of a religious convert, suddenly convinced of sin.

And yet somehow in the depths of my consciousness there was a sensible stir of resentment. The artificial being I had created during my thirty-two years of life had an existence of its own and protested against this threat of instant annihilation. I wanted to defend myself, and I was petulantly irritable because I could find no defence.

For the strange Fate that had planned this astounding revelation to me, had apparently led up to it by the subtlest arrangement of properties and events. My disgrace at the Jervaises' had prepared me for this moment. My responses to humiliation had been, as it were, tested and strained by that ordeal. And at the same time I had been powerfully influenced to despise the life of the Jervaises and all that they stood for, socially and ethically. Then, almost without a pause, a new ideal of life had been presented to me; and the contrast had been so vivid as to awaken even my dulled powers of apprehension. The Jervaise type was more or less familiar to me; their acceptance of security as an established right, their lack of anything like initiative, their general contentment with themselves, their standards of judgment

and their surroundings, represented the attitude towards life with which I was most familiar. It had been my own attitude. I had even dreamed of re-establishing the half-ruined home of the elder branch of the Melhuish family in Derbyshire !

And the contrast afforded by the lives and ambitions of Anne and her brother had been so startling that I believe I must have been stirred by it to some kind of awakening even had I not fallen in love with Anne. I had been given so perfect an opportunity to enter into their feelings and views by my strange and intimate association with their antagonism to all that was typified by the rule of the Hall. By reason of my sympathy with the Banks I had been able to realise the virtue of struggle and the evils of the almost unlimited and quite indiscriminating power wielded by such landowners as old Jervaise. And in condemning him and his family, I must condemn myself also. We were all of us so smug and self-satisfied. We had blindly believed that it was our birthright to reap where we had not sown.

Nevertheless, though the truth was so plain to me in that moment, I accepted it grudgingly. The voice of my artificial self clamoured for a hearing. But these things were so, had always been so, it protested; what could I do to change them? And probably, if it had not been for the force of the thrilling passion of reverence and admiration for Anne that had suddenly illuminated

my whole being, the cultivated inertia of a lifetime would finally have conquered me. I should have thrust the problem away from me and returned with a sensual satisfaction to the familiar way of life I understood. I should have consoled myself with the reflection that mine was not the temperament to face the ardours and disappointments of struggle.

As it was, I longed so furiously to justify myself before Anne; to win, by some heroic measure, her good opinion, that the incentive of my passion bore me triumphantly over the first re-actions of inertia and protest. I could never return to my old complacency, although the mechanical, accustomed habit of my thought had for me, as yet, no suggestion other than some change in the ideal and manner of my writing. I thought vaguely of attempting some didactic drama to illustrate the tragic contrast between gentle and simple that had been so glaringly illuminated for me by recent experience. Yet, even as I played with that idea, I recognised it as a device of my old self to allay my discontent. I caught myself speculating on the promise of the play's success, on the hope of winning new laurels as an earnest student of sociology. I thrust that temptation from me with a sneer at my own inherent hypocrisy.

'But what else *can* you do?' argued my old self and my only reply was to bluster. I bullied myself. I treated myself as a foolish child. The new spirit

in me waved its feeble arms and shouted wildly of its splendid intentions. I could be immensely valiant in the presence of this single listener, but the thought of Anne humiliated and subdued even this bright new spirit that had so amazingly taken possession of me. I wondered if I might not submit my problem to her; ask her what she would have me to do. Nevertheless, I knew that if I would win her esteem, I must act on my own initiative.

My conflict and realisation of new desires had had, however, one salutary effect. The depression of my earlier mood had fallen from me. When I looked round at the widening pool of darkness that flowed and deepened about the undergrowth, I found that it produced no longer any impression of melancholy.

I lifted my head and marched forward with the resolution of a conqueror.

I was nearly clear of the wood when I saw Banks coming towards me. He was carrying my suit-case, and behind him Racquet with a sprightly bearing of the tail that contradicted the droop of his head, followed with the body of a young rabbit.

'Loot from the Hall?' I asked when I came within speaking distance.

'Yes, he's been poaching again,' Banks said, disregarding the application of my remark to the suit-case. 'Well, he can, now, for all I care. He

can have every blessed rabbit and pheasant in the Park if he likes. I'm done with 'em.'

'Things gone badly?' I asked, stretching out my hand for the suit-case.

'I'll carry it,' he said, ignoring my question. 'John had it ready packed when I got there.'

I remembered with a passing qualm that John had not been tipped, but put that thought away as a matter of no pressing importance. 'Had he?' I commented. 'Well, you've carried it half-way, now, I'll carry it the other half.'

'I can do it,' he said.

'You can but you won't,' I replied. 'Hand it over.' I regarded the carrying of that suit-case as a symbol of my new way of life. I hoped that when we arrived at the Farm, Anne might see me carrying it, and realise that even a writer of foolish comedies, who was well off and belonged to the Jervaises' class, might aspire to be the equal of her brother.

'It's all right,' Banks said, and his manner struck a curious mean between respect and friendship.

I laid hold of the suit-case and took it from him almost by force.

'You see, it isn't so much a suit-case as a parable,' I explained.

He looked at me, still reluctant, with an air of perplexity.

'A badge of my friendship for you and your family,' I enlarged. 'You and I, my boy, are pals,

now. I take it you've left the Jervaises' service for good. Imagine that this is Canada, not an infernal Park with a label on every blade of grass warning you not to touch.'

'That's all right,' he agreed. 'But it's extraordinary how it hangs about you. You know—the feeling that they've somehow got you, everywhere. Damn it, if I met the old man in the wood I don't believe I could help touching my hat to him.'

'Just habit,' I suggested.

'A mighty strong one, though,' he said.

'Wait till you're breathing the free air of Canada again,' I replied.

'Ah! that's just it,' he said. 'I may *have* to wait.'

I made sounds of encouragement.

'Or go alone,' he added.

'They've cut up rough, then?' I inquired.

'Young Frank has, anyway,' he said with a brave assumption of breaking away from servility.

'You didn't see the old man?'

'Never a sight of him.'

'And young Frank . . .?'

'Shoved it home for all he was worth. Threatened me with the law and what not. Said if I tried to take Her with me they'd have us stopped and take an action against me for abduction. I suppose it's all right that they can do that?'

'I'm afraid it is,' I said; 'until she comes of age.

'Glad I'd taken the car back, anyhow,' Banks muttered, and I guessed that young Frank's vindictiveness had not been overestimated by Anne. No doubt, he would have been glad enough to complicate the issue by alleging Banks's theft of that car.

'Well, what do you propose to do now?' I asked, after a short interval of silence.

'I don't know,' Banks said desperately, and then added, 'It depends chiefly on Her.'

'She'll probably vote for an elopement,' I suggested.

'And if they come after us and I'm bagged?'

'Don't let yourself get bagged. Escape them.'

'D'you think she'd agree to that? Sneaking off and hiding? Dodging about to get out of the country, somehow?' His tone left me uncertain whether he were asking a question or spurning the idea in disgust.

'Well, what's the alternative?' I replied.

'We might wait,' he said. 'She'll be of age in thirteen months' time.'

I had no fear but that Banks would wait thirteen months, or thirteen years, for Brenda. I was less certain about her. Just now she was head over ears in romance, and I believed that if she married him his sterling qualities would hold her. But I mistrusted the possible effect upon her of thirteen months' absence. The Jervaises would know very well how to use their advantage. They would

take her away from the Hall and its associations, and plunge her into the distractions of a society that could not yet have lost its glamour for her. I could picture Brenda looking back with wonder at the foolishness of the girl who had imagined herself to be in love with her father's chauffeur. And even an hour earlier, so recent had been my true conversion, I should have questioned the advisability of a hasty, secret marriage between these two temporarily infatuated people. Now I was hot with the evangelising passion of a young disciple. I wanted to deliver Brenda from the thrall of society at any price. It seemed to me that the greatest tragedy for her would be a marriage with some one in her own class—young Turnbull, for instance.

'I shouldn't wait,' I said decidedly.

'Why not?' he asked with a touch of resentment, as if he had guessed something of my mistrust of Brenda.

'All very well, in a way, for you,' I explained. 'But think what an awful time she'd have, with all of them trying to nag her into a marriage with young Turnbull, or somebody of that kind.'

'He isn't so bad as some of 'em,' Banks said, evading the main issue. 'She'd never marry him though. She knows him too well, for one thing. He's been scouring the county in a dog-cart all the morning—went to Hurley to make inquiries before breakfast, and all over the place afterwards.

John's been telling me. He heard 'em talking when young Turnbull turned up at tea-time. He's got guts all right, that fellow. I believe he'd play the game fair enough if they tried to make her marry him. Besides, as I said, she'd never do it.'

'I don't suppose she would,' I said, humouring him—it was no part of my plan to disturb his perfect faith in Brenda—'I only said that she'd have a rotten bad time during those thirteen months.'

'Well, we've got to leave that to her, haven't we?' Banks returned.

I thought not, but I judged it more tactful to keep my opinion to myself.

'We shall be quite safe in doing that,' I said as we turned into the back premises of the Home Farm.

Banks had forgotten about my suit-case, and I bore the burden of it, flauntingly, up the hill. Racquet followed us with an air of conscious humility.

And it was Racquet that Anne first addressed when she met us at the door of the house.

'Whose rabbit is that?' she asked sternly.

Racquet instantly dropped his catch and slowly approached Anne with a mien of exaggerated abasement.

'If you were an out and out socialist, I shouldn't mind,' Anne continued, 'but you shouldn't do these things if you're ashamed of them afterwards.'

Racquet continued to supplicate her with bowed head, but he gave one surreptitious flick of his stumpy tail, that to me had the irresistible suggestion of a wink.

'Hypocrite!' Anne said, whereupon Racquet, correctly judging by her tone that his forgiveness was assured, made one splendid leap at her, returned with an altogether too patent eagerness to his rabbit, picked it up, and trotted away round the corner of the house.

'Isn't he a humbug?' Anne asked, looking at me, and continued without waiting for my confirmation of the epithet, 'Why didn't you let Arthur carry that?'

'He carried it half the way,' I said. 'He and I are the out and out kind of socialist.'

She did not smile. 'Father and mother are home,' she said, turning to her brother. 'I can see by your face the sort of thing they've been saying to you at the Hall, so I suppose we'd better have the whole story on the carpet over supper. Father's been asking already what Brenda's here for.'

XIII

FARMER BANKS

ANNE showed me up to my room as soon as we entered the house, but her manner was that of the hostess to a strange guest. She was polite, formal, and, I thought, a trifle nervous. She left me hurriedly as soon as she had opened the door of the bedroom, with some apology about having to 'see to the supper.' (The smell of frying bacon had pervaded the staircase and passages, and had helped me to realise that I was most uncommonly hungry. Except for a very light lunch I had eaten nothing since breakfast.)

I got my first real feeling of the strangeness of the whole affair while I was unpacking my suitcase in that rather stiff, unfriendly spare-room. Until then the sequence of events had followed a hot succession, in the current of which I had had no time to consider myself—my ordinary, daily self—in relation to them. But the associations of this familiar position and occupation, this adaptation of myself for a few hours to a strange household, evoked the habitual sensations of a hundred similar experiences. Twenty-four hours earlier I had been dressing for dinner at Jervaise Hall, and

despite my earnest affirmations that in the interval my whole life and character had changed, I was very surely aware that I was precisely the same man I had always been—the man who washed, and changed his tie, and brushed his hair in just this same manner every day; who looked at himself in the glass with that same half-frowning, half-anxious expression, as if he were uncertain whether to resent or admire the familiar reflection. I was confronted by the image of the Graham Melhuish to whom I had become accustomed; the image of the rather well-groomed, rather successful young man that I had come to regard as the complete presentation of my individuality.

But now I saw that that image in the glass could never have done the things that I had done that day. I could not imagine that stereotyped creature wanting to fight Frank Jervaise, running away from the Hall, taking the side of a chauffeur in an intrigue with his master's daughter, falling in love with a woman he had not known for twenty-four hours, and, culminating wonder, making extraordinary determinations to renounce the pleasures and comforts of life in order to . . . I could not quite define what, but the substitute was something very strenuous and difficult and self-sacrificing.

Nevertheless, some one had done all these things, and if it were not that conventional, self-satisfied impersonation now staring back at me with a look of perplexed inquiry, where was I to find

his outward likeness? Had I looked a different man when I was talking to Anne in the Farm parlour or when I had communed with myself in the wood? Or if the real Graham Melhuish were something better and deeper than this fraudulent reflection of him, how could he get out, get through, in some way or other achieve a permanent expression to replace this deceptive mask? Also, which of us was doing the thinking at that moment? Did we take it turn and turn about? Five minutes before the old, familiar Melhuish had undoubtedly been unpacking his bag in his old familiar way, and wondering how he had come to do all the queer things he unquestionably had been doing in the course of this amazing week-end. Now, the new Melhuish was uppermost again, speculating about the validity of his soul—a subject that had certainly never concerned the other fellow, hitherto.

But it was the other fellow who was in the ascendant when I entered the farm sitting-room in answer to the summons of a falsetto bell. I was shy. I felt like an intruder. I was afraid that Farmer Banks would treat me as a distinguished visitor, and that my efforts to attain the happy freedom of an equal might—in the eyes of Anne—appear condescending. The new self I had so lately discovered was everybody's equal, but, just then, I was out of touch with my new self.

Nor did Farmer Banks's natural courtesy tend to put me at ease. He and Arthur were alone in

the room when I came down and it was Arthur who, with an evident self-consciousness, introduced me.

'Mr Melhuish, father,' was all he said, and I had no idea how much of the story the old man had, as yet, been told.

He made a kind of stiff bow and held out his hand. 'Pleased to meet you, Mr Melhuish,' he said, and his manner struck a mean between respectfulness and self-assertion. It was the kind of manner that he might have shown to a titled canvasser just before an election.

He was a notably handsome man, tall and broad, with regular, impassive features and blue eyes, exactly the colour of Arthur's. Save that his back was slightly rounded and that his closely-cropped hair was iron-gray, he showed little mark of his sixty years. He seemed to me the very type of an English yeoman, not markedly intelligent outside his own speciality, and conservative to the point of fanaticism. When I thought of trying to persuade him to forsake the usage of a lifetime and begin again in a foreign country under new conditions, my heart failed me. Upstairs, before the looking-glass, I had had my doubts of the possibility of ever ousting the old Graham Melhuish; but those doubts appeared the most childish exaggerations of difficulty when compared with my doubts of persuading the man before me to alter his habits and his whole way of life. It

seemed to me that the spirit of Farmer Banks must be encrusted beyond all hope of release.

I mumbled some politeness in answer to his unanswerable opening, and started the one possible topic of the weather. I was grossly ignorant of the general requirements of agriculture in that or any other connection, but any one knows a farmer wants fine weather for harvest.

He took me up with a slightly exaggerated air of relief, and I dare say we could have kept the subject going for ten minutes if it had been necessary, but he had hardly begun his reply before the three women for whom we had been waiting came into the room together.

When I met Mr Banks I felt, at once, that I might have inferred him with nice accuracy from what I already knew of him. Mrs Banks was a surprise. I had pictured her as tall and slight, and inclined to be sombre. Anne's hints of the romantic side of her mother's temperament had, for some reason, suggested that image to me, and I was quite absurdly dumfounded for the moment when I saw this little, roundabout, dark-haired Frenchwoman, as typically exotic as her husband was home-grown, voluble, brisk despite the handicap of her figure, and with nothing English about her unless it were her accent.

Fortunately she gave me no time to display the awkwardness of my surprise. She came straight at me, talking from the instant she entered the

door. 'Discussing the crops already?' she said. 'You must forgive us, Mr Melhuish, for being so interested in the weather. When one's fortune depends upon it, one naturally thinks of little else.' She gave me her small plump hand with an engaging but, as it were, a breathless smile. 'And you must be starving,' she continued rapidly. 'Anne tells me you had no tea at all anywhere, and that the people at the Hall have been treating you outrageously. So! will you sit there and Anne next to you, and those two dreadful children who won't be separated, together on the other side.'

She was apparently intent only upon this business of getting us into our places about the supper-table, and not until I had sat down did I realise that her last sentence had been an announcement intended for her husband.

'What did you say, Nancy?' he asked with a puzzled air. He was still standing at the head of the table and staring with obvious embarrassment at his wife.

She waved her hands at him. 'Sit down, Alfred,' she commanded him, and in her pronunciation of his name I noticed for the first time the ripple of a French 'r.' Possibly her manner of speaking his name was a form of endearment. 'All in good time, you shall hear about it directly. Now, we are all very hungry and waiting for you.' And without the least hint of a pause she turned to me and glided over an apology for the nature of

the meal. 'We call it supper,' she said, 'and it is just a farm-house supper, but better in its way, don't you think, than a formal dinner?' She took me utterly into her confidence with her smile as she added, 'Up at the Hall they make so much ceremony, all about nothing. I am not surprised that you ran away. But it was very original, all the same.' She introduced me to the first course without taking breath, 'Eggs and bacon. So English. Isn't there a story of a man who starved to death on a walking-tour because he could no longer endure to eat eggs and bacon? And when you have eaten something you must tell us what you have all four been doing while my husband and I were away. So far as I can understand you have turned the universe completely inside out. We came back believing that we return to the Farm, but I think it has become a Fortress. . . .'

I ventured a glance at her husband. These flickering allusions of hers to the tragedy that was threatening him, seemed to me indiscreet and rather too frivolous. But when I saw his look of puzzled wonder and admiration, I began to appreciate the subtlety and wisdom of her method. Using me as a convenient intermediary, she was breaking the news by what were, to him, almost inappreciable degrees. He took in her hints so slowly. He was not sure from moment to moment whether or not she was in earnest. Nevertheless, I recognised, I thought, at least one cause for perturbation.

He had been perceptibly ruffled and uneasy at the reference to an understanding between his son and Brenda. Probably the fear of that complication had been in his mind for some time past.

Mrs Banks had slid away to the subject of local scenery.

'It is beautiful in its own way,' she was saying, 'but I feel with Arthur that it has an air of being so—preserved. It is so proper, well-adjusted, I forget the English word . . .'

I suggested 'trim' as a near translation of 'propre' and 'bien-ajusté.'

'Trim, yes,' she agreed enthusiastically. 'My daughter tells me you are an author. There are three lime trees in the pasture and the cattle have eaten the branches as high as they can reach, so that now the trees have the precise shape of a bell. Even the trees in the Park, you see, are trim—not, it is true, like Versailles, where the poor things are made to grow according to plan—but all the county is one great landscape garden; all of England, nearly. Don't you agree with me? One feels that there must always be a game-keeper or a policeman just round the corner.'

She waited for my answer this time, and something in the eagerness of her expression begged me to play up to her lead.

'I know exactly what you mean,' I said, intensely aware of Anne's proximity. 'I was thinking something of the same kind, only this evening, when

I went to meet Arthur in the wood. He and I were discussing it, too, as we came back. That sense of everything belonging to some one else, of having no right, hardly the right to breathe without the Jervaises' permission.'

Her gesture finally confirmed the fact that perfect confidence was established between us. I felt as if she had patted my shoulder. But she may have been afraid that I might blunder into too obvious a statement, if I were permitted to continue, for she abruptly changed her tactics by saying to Brenda,—

'So you ran away in the middle of the dance?'

'Well, we'd finished dancing, as a matter of fact,' Brenda explained.

Mr Banks shifted uneasily in his chair. 'Ran away, Miss Brenda?' he asked. 'Did you say you'd run away?'

She flattered him with a look that besought his approval. 'I simply couldn't stand it any longer,' she said.

'But you'll be going back?' he returned, after a moment's pause.

She shook her head, still regarding him attentively with an air of appeal that implied submission to his judgment.

He had stopped eating, and now pushed his chair back a little from the table as though he needed more space to deal with this tremendous problem.

'You'll be getting us into trouble, Miss Brenda,' he

warned her gravely. 'It wouldn't do for us to keep you here, if they're wanting you to go back home.'

'Well, Alfred, we've as much right to her as they have,' Mrs Banks put in.

The effect upon him of that simple speech was quite remarkable. He opened his fine blue eyes and stared at his wife with a blank astonishment that somehow conveyed an impression of fear.

'Nancy! Nancy!' he expostulated in a tone that besought her to say no more.

She laughingly waved her hands at him, using the same gesture with which she had commanded him to sit down. 'Oh! we've got to face it, Alfred,' she said. 'Arthur and Brenda believe they're in love with one another, and that's all about it.'

Banks shook his head solemnly, but it seemed to me that his manner expressed relief rather than the added perturbation I had expected. 'No, no, it won't do. That'd never do,' he murmured. 'I've been afraid of this, Miss Brenda,' he continued; 'but you must see for yourself that it'd never do—our position being what it is. Your father'd never hear of such a thing; and you'd get us all into trouble with him if he thought we'd been encouraging you.'

He drew in his chair and returned to his supper as if he regarded the matter as being now definitely settled. 'I don't know what Mr Melhuish will be thinking of us,' he added as an afterthought.

'Oh! Mr Melhuish is on our side,' Mrs Banks returned gaily.

'Nancy! Nancy!' he reproved her. 'This is too serious a matter to make a joke about.'

I was watching Mrs Banks, and saw the almost invisible lift of the eyebrows with which she passed on the conduct of the case to Anne.

'Mother isn't joking, dear,' Anne said, accepting the signal without an instant's hesitation. 'Really serious things have been happening while you were away.'

Her father frowned and shook his head. 'This isn't the place to discuss them,' he replied.

'Well, father, I'm afraid we must discuss them very soon,' Anne returned; 'because Mr Jervaise might be coming up after supper.'

'Mr Jervaise? Coming here?' Banks's tone of dismay showed that he was beginning, however slowly, to appreciate the true significance of the situation.

'Well, we don't know that he is,' Arthur put in. 'I just thought it was possible he and Mr Frank might come up this evening.'

'They will certainly come. Have no doubt of that,' Mrs Banks remarked.

The old man turned to his son as if seeking a refuge from the intrigues of his adored but incomprehensible womenfolk.

'What for?' he asked brusquely.

'To take her back to the Hall,' Arthur said with the least possible inclination of his head towards Brenda.

Banks required a few seconds to ponder, that

and his wife and daughter waited in silence for his reply. I had a sense of them as watching over, and at once sheltering and directing him. Nevertheless, though I admired their gentle deftness, I think that at that point of the discussion some forcible male element in me sided very strongly with old Banks. I was aware of the pressure that was so insensibly surrounding him as of a subtly entangling web that seemed to offer no resistance, and yet was slowly smothering him in a million intricate intangible folds. And, after all, why should he be torn away from his root-holds, exiled to some forlorn unknown country where his very methods of farming would be inapplicable? Brenda and Arthur were young and capable. Let them wait, at least until she came of age. Let her be tried by an ordeal of patient resistance. If she were worthy she could fight her family for those thirteen months and win her own triumph without injuring poor Banks.

And whether because I had communicated my thought to her by some change of attitude or because she intuitively shared my sympathy for her father, Anne turned to me just before she spoke, with a quick little, impatient gesture as if beseeching me not to interfere. I submitted myself to her wish with a distinct feeling of pleasure, but made no application of my own joy in serving her to the case of her father.

He was speaking again, now, with a solemn

perplexity, as if he were confusedly challenging the soft opposition of his women's influence.

'But, of course, she must go back to the Hall,' he said. 'You wouldn't like to get us into trouble, would you, Miss Brenda? You see,' he pushed his chair back once more, in the throes of his effort to explain himself, 'your father would turn me out, if there was any fuss.'

He was going on, but his wife, with a sudden magnificent violence, scattered the web she and her daughter had been weaving.

'And that might be the best thing that could happen to us, Alfred,' she said. 'Oh! I'm so sick and tired of these foolish Jervaises. They are like the green fly on the rose trees. They stick there and do nothing but suck the life out of us. You are a free man. You owe them nothing. Let us break with them and go out, all of us, to Canada with Arthur and Brenda. As for me, I would rejoice to go.'

'Nancy! Nancy!' he reproached her for the third time, with a humouring shake of his head. They were past the celebration of their silver wedding, but it was evident that he still saw in her the adorable foolishness of one who would never be able to appreciate the final infallibility of English standards. He loved her, he would make immense personal sacrifices for her, but in these matters she was still a child, a foreigner. Just so might he have reproached Anne at three years old for some infantile naughtiness.

'It may come to that,' Arthur interjected, gloomily.

'You're talking like a fool, Arthur,' his father said. 'What'd I do at my age—I'll be sixty-one next month—trapesing off to Canada?' He felt on safer ground, more sure of his authority in addressing his son. He was English. He might be rebellious and need chastisement, but he would not be swayed by these whimsical notions that sometimes bewitched his mother and sister.

'But, father, we may *have* to go,' Anne softly reminded him.

'Have to? Have to?' he repeated, with a new note of irritability sounding in his voice. 'He hasn't been doing anything foolish, has he? Nothing as can't be got over?'

It was his wife who replied to that. 'We've had our time, Alfred,' she said. 'We have to think of them now. We must not be selfish. They are young and deeply in love, as you and I were once. We cannot separate them because we are too lazy to move. And sixty? Yes, it is true that you are sixty, but you are strong and your heart is still young. It is not as if you were an old man.'

Arthur and Brenda looked acutely self-conscious. Brenda blushed and seemed inclined to giggle. Arthur's face was set in the stern lines of one who hears his own banns called in church.

Banks leaned back in his chair and stared apprehensively at his wife. 'D'ye mean it,

Nancy . . .?' he asked, and something in his delivery of the phrase suggested that he had come down to a familiar test of decision. I could only infer that whenever she had confessed to 'meaning it' in the past, her request had never so far been denied. I guessed, also, that until now she had never been outrageous in her demands.

'What else can be done, dear?' she replied gently. 'There is no choice otherwise, except for them to separate.'

He looked at the culprits with an expression of bewilderment. Why should their little love affair be regarded as being of such tragic consequence, he seemed to ask. What did they mean to him and his wife and daughter? Why should they be considered worthy of what he could only picture as a supreme, and almost intolerable sacrifice? These young people were always having love affairs.

He thrust his inquiry bluntly at Brenda. 'Are you in earnest, then, Miss Brenda?' he asked. 'D'you tell me that you want to marry him—that you're set on it?'

'I mean to marry him whatever happens,' Brenda replied in a low voice. She was still abashed by this public discussion of her secrets. And it was probably with some idea of diverting him from this intimate probing of her desires that she continued more boldly. 'We would go off together, without your consent, you know, if we thought

it would do any good. But it wouldn't, would it? They'd probably be more spiteful still, if we did that. Even if they could keep it dark, they'd never let you stay on here. But do you really think it would be so awful for us all to go to Canada together? It's a wrench, of course, but I expect it would be frightfully jolly when we got there. Arthur says it is.'

He turned from her with the least hint of contempt to look at his son. 'You've lost *your* place a'ready, I suppose?' he said, trying to steady himself by some familiar contact, an effort that would have been absurd if it had not been so pathetic.

Arthur nodded, as stolid as an owl.

His father continued to search him with the same half-bewildered stare.

'What are you going to do, then?' he asked.

'She and I are going back, whatever happens,' Arthur said.

'And suppose they won't let her go?'

'They'll have to.'

'Have to!' Banks recited, raising his voice at the repetition of this foolish phrase. 'And how in the world are you going to make 'em?'

'The Jervaises aren't everybody,' Arthur growled.

'You'll find they're a sight too strong for the like of us to go against,' Banks affirmed threateningly.

Arthur looked stubborn and shook his head. 'They aren't what you think they are, father,'

he began, and then, seeing the incredulity on the old man's face, he went on in a slightly raised voice, 'Well, I know they aren't. I've been up there twice to-day. I saw Mr Jervaise this morning; went to the front door and asked for him, and when I saw him I put it to him straight that I meant to—that we were going to get married.'

'You did,' murmured Banks in an undertone of grieved dismay.

'I did, father,' Arthur proceeded; 'and if it hadn't been for young Mr Frank, we'd have come to some sort of understanding. Mr Jervaise didn't actually say "No," as it was.'

'And you went up again this evening?' Banks prompted him.

'Yes; I only saw Mr Frank, then,' Arthur replied, 'and he was in such a pad, there was no talking to him. Anne can tell you why.'

Banks did not speak but he turned his eyes gravely to his daughter.

Anne lifted her head with the movement of one who decides to plunge and be done with it. 'He'd been making love to me in the morning,' she said; 'and I—played with him for Arthur's sake. I thought it might help, and afterwards I showed him that I'd been letting him make a fool of himself for nothing, that's all.'

The old man made no audible comment, but his head drooped a little forward and his body seemed to shrink a little within the sturdy solidity

of his oak arm-chair. Anne, also, had betrayed him. Perhaps he looked forward and saw the Home Farm without Anne—she could not stay after that—and realised that the verdict of his destiny was finally pronounced.

I turned my eyes away from him, and I think the others, too, feigned some preoccupation that left him a little space of solitude. We none of us spoke, and I knew by the sound of the quick intake of her breath that Mrs Banks was on the verge of weeping.

I looked up, almost furtively, when I heard the crash of footsteps on the gravel outside, and I found that the other three with the same instinctive movement of suspense were turning towards Mrs Banks.

She dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief and nodded to Anne, a nod that said plainly enough, 'It's them—the Jervaises.'

And then we were all startled by the sound of the rude and unnecessary violence of their knock at the front door. No doubt, Frank was still 'in a pad.'

Yet no one moved until the old man at the head of the table looked up with a deep sigh, and said,—

'They'd better come in and be done with it, Nancy.'

His glance was slowly travelling round the room as if he were bidding those familiar things a reluctant farewell. All his life had been lived in that house.

XIV

MRS BANKS

THE insulting attack upon the front door was made again with even greater violence while we still waited, united, as I believe, in one sympathetic resolve to shield the head of the house from any unnecessary distress. He alone was called upon to make sacrifice; it was our single duty and privilege to encircle and protect him. And if my own feelings were representative, we fairly bristled with resentment when this vulgar demand for admittance was repeated. These domineering, comfortable, respectability-loving Jervaises were the offenders; the sole cause of our present anxiety. We had a bitter grievance against them and they came swaggering and bullying, as if the threat to their silly prestige were the important thing.

'You'd better go, dear,' Mrs Banks said with a nod to Anne. The little woman's eyes were bright with the eagerness for battle, but she continued to talk automatically on absurdly immaterial subjects to relieve the strain of even those few seconds of waiting.

'Our maid is out, you see, Mr Melhuish,' she explained quickly, and turning to Brenda,

continued without a pause, 'So Anne has even had to lend you a dress. You're about of a height, but you're so much slighter. Still, with very little alteration, her things would fit you very well. If we should be obliged . . . ' She broke off abruptly as Anne returned, followed by Mr Jervaise and the glowering, vindictive figure of his son.

Anne's manner of entrance alone would have been sufficient to demonstrate her attitude to the intruders, but she elected to make it still more unmistakable by her announcement of them.

'The Jervaises, mother,' she said with a supercilious lift of her head. She might have been saying that the men had called for the rent.

Little Mrs Banks looked every inch an aristocrat as she received them. The gesture of her plump little white hands as she indicated chairs was almost regal in its authority.

Old Jervaise, obviously nervous, accepted the invitation, but Frank, after closing the door, stood leaning with his back against it. The position gave him command of the whole room, and at the same time conveyed a general effect of threat. His attitude said, 'Now we've got you, and none of you shall leave the room until you've paid in full for your impertinence.' I had guessed from his knock that he had finally put his weakness for Anne away from him. He was clever enough to realise just how and why she had fooled him. His single object, now, was revenge.

Banks brooded, rather neglected and overlooked, in a corner by the window. He appeared to have accepted his doom as assured, and being plunged into the final gulf of despair, he had, now, no heart even to be apologetic. The solid earth of his native country was slipping away from him; nothing else mattered.

There was one brief, tense interval of silence before old Jervaise began to speak. We all waited for him to state the case; Frank because he meant to reserve himself for the dramatic moment; we others because we preferred to throw the onus of statement upon him. (I do believe that throughout that interview it is fair to speak of 'we others,' of the whole six of us, almost as of a single mind with a single intention. We played our individual parts in our own manners, but we were subject to a single will which was, I firmly believe, the will of Mrs Banks. Even her husband followed her lead, if he did it with reluctance, while the rest of us obeyed her with delight.)

Old Jervaise fumbled his opening. He looked pale and tired, as if he would be glad to be out of it.

'We have called,' he began, striving for an effect of magisterial gravity; 'we have come here, Mrs Banks, to fetch my daughter. I understand that you've been away from home—you and your husband—and you're probably not aware of what has taken—has been going on in your absence.'

'Oh! yes, we know,' Mrs Banks put in disconcertingly. She was sitting erect and contemptuous in her chair at the foot of the table. For one moment something in her pose reminded me of Queen Victoria.

'Indeed? You have heard; since your return?' faltered old Jervaise. 'But I cannot suppose for one moment that either you or your husband approve of—of your son's gross misbehaviour.' He got out the accusation with an effort; he had to justify himself before his son. But the slight stoop of his shoulders, and his hesitating glances at Mrs Banks were propitiatory, almost apologetic. It seemed to me that he pleaded with her to realise that he could say and do no less than what he was saying and doing; to understand and to spare him.

'But that is new to me,' Mrs Banks replied. 'I have heard nothing of any gross misbehaviour.'

She was so clearly mistress of the situation that I might have been sorry for old Jervaise, if it had not been for the presence of that scowling fool by the door.

'I—I'm afraid I can describe your son's conduct as—as nothing less than gross misbehaviour,' the old man stammered, 'having consideration to his employment. But, perhaps, you have not been properly informed of the—of the offence.'

'Is it an offence to love unwisely, Mr Jervaise?' Mrs Banks shot at him with a sudden ferocity.

He blustered feebly. 'You *must* see how impossible it is for your son to dream of marrying my daughter,' he said. The blood had mounted to his face; and he looked as if he longed to get up and walk out. I wondered vaguely whether Frank had had that eventuality in mind when he blockaded the door with his own gloomy person.

'Tchah!' ejaculated Mrs Banks with supreme contempt. 'Do not talk that nonsense to me, but listen, now, to what I have to say. I will make everything quite plain to you. We have decided that Arthur and Brenda shall be married; but we condescend to that amiable weakness of yours which always demands that there shall be no scandal. It must surely be your motto at the Hall to avoid scandal—at any cost. So we are agreed to make a concession. The marriage we insist upon; but we are willing, all of us, to emigrate. We will take ourselves away, so that no one can point to the calamity of a marriage between a Banks and a Jervaise. It will, I think, break my husband's heart, but we see that there is nothing else to be done.'

Old Jervaise's expression was certainly one of relief. He would, I am sure, have agreed to that compromise if he had been alone; he might even have agreed, as it was, if he had been given the chance. But Frank realised his father's weakness not less surely than we did, and although this was probably not the precise moment he would have

chosen, he instantly took the case into his own hands.

'Oh! no, Mrs Banks, certainly not,' he said. 'In the first place we did not come here to bargain with you, and in the second it must be perfectly plain to you that the scandal remains none the less because you have all gone away. We have come to fetch my sister home, that's the only thing that concerns you.'

'And if she will not go with you?' asked Mrs Banks.

'She must,' Frank returned.

'And still, if she will not go?'

'Then we shall bring an action against you for abducting her.'

Mrs Banks smiled gently and pursed her mouth. 'To avoid a scandal?' she asked.

'If you persist in your absurd demands, there will be a scandal in any case,' Frank replied curtly.

'I suppose my wishes don't count at all?' Brenda put in.

'Obviously they don't,' Frank said.

'But, look here, father,' Brenda continued, turning to old Jervaise; '*why* do you want me to come back? We've never got on, I and the rest of you. *Why* can't you let me go and be done with it?'

Jervaise fidgeted uneasily and looked up with a touch of appeal at his son. He had begun to mumble some opening when Frank interposed.

'Because we won't,' he said, 'and that's the end of it. There's nothing more to be said. I've told you precisely how the case stands. Either you come back with us without a fuss, or we shall begin an action at once.'

I know now that Frank Jervaise was merely bluffing, and that they could have had no case, since Brenda was over eighteen, and was not being detained against her will. But none of us, probably not even old Jervaise himself, knew enough of the law to question the validity of the threat.

Little Mrs Banks, however, was not depending on her legal knowledge to defeat her enemies. What woman would? She had been exchanging glances with her husband during the brief interval in which she had entrusted a minor plea to her junior, and I suppose she, now, considered herself free to produce her trump card. Banks had turned his back on the room—perhaps the first time he had ever so slighted his landlord and owner—and was leaning his forehead against the glass of the window. His attitude was that of a man who had no further interest in such trivialities as this bickering and scheming. Perhaps he was dimly struggling to visualise what life in Canada might mean for him?

His wife's eyes were still shining with the zest of her present encounter. She was too engrossed by that to consider just then the far heavier task she would presently have to undertake. She

shrugged her shoulders and made a gesture with her hands that implied the throwing of all further responsibility upon her antagonists. 'If you will have it,' she seemed to say, 'you must take the consequences.' And old Jervaise, at all events, foresaw what was coming, and at that eleventh hour made one last effort to avert it.

'You know, Frank . . . ' he began, but Mrs Banks interrupted him.

'It is useless, Mr Jervaise,' she said. 'Mr Frank has been making love to my daughter and she has shown him plainly how she despises him. After that he will not listen to you. He seeks his revenge. It is the manner of your family to make love in that way.'

'Impertinence will not make things any easier for you, Mrs Banks,' Frank interpolated.

'Impertinence? From me to you?' the little woman replied magnificently. 'Be quiet, boy, you do not know what you are saying. My husband and I have saved your poor little family from disgrace for twenty years, and I would say nothing now, if it were not that you have compelled me.'

She threw one glance of contempt at old Jervaise, who was leaning forward with his hand over his mouth, as if he were in pain, and then continued,—

'But it is as well that you should know the truth, and after all, the secret remains in good keeping. And you understand that it is apropos to that case

you are threatening. It might be as well for you to know before you bring that case against us.'

'Well,' urged Frank sardonically. He was, I think, the one person in the room who was not tense with expectation. Nothing but physical fear could penetrate that hide of his.

'Well, Mr Frank,' she did not deign to imitate him, but she took up his word as if it were a challenge. 'Well, it is as well for you to know that Brenda is not your mother's daughter.' She turned as she spoke to Brenda herself, with a protective gesture of her little hand. 'I know it will not grieve you, dear, to hear that,' she continued. 'It is not as if you were so attached to them all at the Hall . . .'

'But who, then . . .?' Brenda began, evidently too startled by this astonishing news to realise its true significance.

'She was my step-sister, Claire Sévérac, dear,' Mrs Banks explained. 'She was Olive's governess. Oh ! poor Claire, how she suffered ! It was, perhaps, a good thing after all that she died so soon after you were born. Her heart was broken. She was so innocent; she could not realise that she was no more than a casual mistress for your father. And then Mrs Jervaise, whom you have believed to be your mother, was very unkind to my poor Claire. Yet it seemed best just then, in her trouble, that she should go away to Italy, and that it should be pretended that you were Mrs Jervaise's true daughter. I arranged that. I have blamed myself

since, but I did not understand at the time that Mrs Jervaise consented solely that she might keep you in sight of your father as a reminder of his sin. She was spiteful, and at that time she had the influence. She threatened a separation if she was not allowed to have her own way. So! the secret was kept and there were so few who remember my poor Claire that it is only Alfred and I who know how like her you are, my dear. She had not, it is true, your beautiful fair hair that is so striking with your dark eyes. But your temperament, yes. She, too, was full of spirit, vivacious, gay—until afterwards.'

She paused with a deep sigh, and I think we all sighed with her in concert. She had held us with her narrative. She had, as a matter of fact, told us little enough and that rather allusively, but I felt that I knew the whole history of the unhappy Claire Sévérac. Anne had not overrated her mother's powers in this direction. And my sigh had in it an element of relief. Some strain had been mercifully relaxed.

The sound of Frank's harsh voice came as a gross intrusion on our silence.

'What evidence have you got of all this?' he asked, but the ring of certainty had gone from his tone.

Mrs Banks pointed with a superb gesture at his father.

The old man was leaning forward in his chair

with his face in his hands. There was no spirit in him. Probably he was thinking less of the present company than of Claire Sévérac.

Frank Jervaise showed his true quality on that occasion. He looked down at his father with scowling contempt, stared for a moment as if he would finally wring the old man's soul with some expression of filial scorn, and then flung himself out of the room, banging the door behind him as a proclamation that he finally washed his hands of the whole affair.

Old Jervaise looked up when the door banged and rose rather feebly to his feet. For a moment he looked at Arthur, as though he were prepared, now, to meet even that more recent impeachment of his virtue which he had feared earlier in the day. But Arthur's face gave no sign of any vindictive intention, and the old man silently followed his son, creeping out with the air of a man who submissively shoulders the burden of his disgrace.

I had been sorry for him that morning, but I was still sorrier for him then. Banks was suffering righteously and might find relief in that knowledge, but this man was reaping the just penalties of his own acts.

XV

REMEMBRANCE

I DO not believe that any of them saw me leave the room.

As soon as old Jervaise had gone, all of them had turned with an instinct of protection towards the head of the family. He, alone, had been sacrificed. Within an hour his whole life had been changed, and I began to doubt, as Anne had doubted, whether so old a tree would bear transplanting. Whatever tenderness and care could do, would be done for him, but the threat of uprooting had come so suddenly. In any case, I could not help those gentle foresters whose work it would be to conduct the critical operation; and I walked out of the room without offering any perfunctory excuse for leaving them.

I made my way into the garden by the side door through which I had first entered the Home Farm; and after one indeterminate moment, came to a halt at the gate on the slope of the hill. I did not want to go too far from the house. For the time being I was no more to the Banks than an inconvenient visitor, but I hoped that presently some of them—I put it that way to myself—would miss

me, and that Arthur or Anne would come and tell me what had been arranged in my absence. I should have been glad to talk over the affair with Arthur, but I hoped that it would not be Arthur who would come to find me.

For a time my thoughts flickered capriciously over the astonishing events of my adventurous week-end. I was pleasantly replete with experience. In all my life I had never before entered thus completely into any of the great movements of life. I recalled my first thrills of anticipation amidst the glowing, excited youth of the resting dancers at the Hall. We had been impatient for further expression. The dragging departure of the Sturtions had been an unbearable check upon the exuberance of our desires. In my thought of the scene I could see the unspent spirit of our vitality streaming up in a fierce fount of energy.

And with me, at least, that fount, unexpectedly penned by the first hints of disaster, had still played furiously in my mind as I had walked with Frank Jervaise through the wood. My intoxicated imagination had created its own setting. I had gone, exalted, to meet my wonderful fate. Through some strange scene of my own making I had strayed to the very feet of enduring romance.

But after that exciting prelude, when the moon had set and slow dawn, like a lifting curtain, had been drawn to reveal the landscape of a world outside the little chamber of my own being, I had

been cast from my heights of exaltation into a gloomy pit of disgrace. Fate, with a fastidious particularity, had hauled me back to the things of everyday. I was not to be allowed to dream too long. I was wanted to play my part in this sudden tragedy of experience.

My thought went off at a tangent when I reached that point of my reflection. I had found myself involved in the Banks's drama, but what hope had I of ever seeing them again after the next day? What, moreover, was the great thing I was called upon to do? I had decided only an hour or two before that my old way of life had become impossible for me, but equally impossible was any way of life that did not include the presence of Anne.

I looked at my watch, and found that it was after ten o'clock, but how long I had been standing at the gate, I had no idea; whether an hour or ten minutes. I had been dreaming again, lost in imaginative delights; until the reminder of this new urgency had brought me back to a reality that demanded from me an energy of participation and of initiative.

I wished that Anne would come—and by way of helping her should she, indeed, have come out to look for me, I strolled back to the Farm, and then round to the front of the house.

The windows of the sitting-room had been closed but the blinds were not drawn. The lamp

had been lit and splayed weak fans of yellow light on to the gravel, and the flower-beds of the grass plot. The path of each beam was picked out from the diffused radiance of the moonlight, by the dancing figures of the moths that gathered and fluttered across the prisms of these enchanted rays. But I did not approach the windows. In the stillness of the night I could hear Anne's clear musical voice. She was still there in the sitting-room, still soothing and persuading her father. Her actual words were indistinguishable, but the modulations of her tone seemed to convey the sense of her speech, as a melody may convey the ideas of form and colour.

I returned to my vigil at the gate and to thoughts of Anne—to romantic thoughts of worship and service; of becoming worthy of her regard; of immense faithfulness to her image when confronted with the most provocative temptations; to thoughts of self-sacrifice and bravado, of humility and boasting; of some transcending glorification of myself that should make me worthy of her love.

I was arrested in the midst of my ecstatic sentimentalism by the sight of the Hall, the lights of which were distantly visible through the trees. The path by the wood was not the direct line from the Hall to the Farm; the sanctities of the Park were not violated by any public right of way. The sight of the place pulled me up, because I was suddenly pierced by the reflection that perhaps

old Jervaise had thus postured to win the esteem of his daughter's governess. He, it is true, had had dignity and prestige on his side, but surely he must have condescended to win her. Had he, too, dreamed dreams of sacrifice at the height of his passion? Had he alternately grovelled and strutted to attract the admiration of his lady? I found the reflection markedly distasteful. I was sorry again, now, for the old man. He had suffered heavy penalties for his lapse. I remembered Mrs Banks's hint that his wife had adopted Brenda in the first place in order that he might have before him a constant reminder of his disgrace. I could believe that. It was just such a piece of chicane as I should expect from that timid hawk, Mrs Jervaise. But while I pitied the man, I could not look upon his furtive gratifications of passion with anything but distaste.

No; if my love for Anne was to be worthy of so wonderful an object, I must not stupefy myself with these vapours of romance. The ideal held something finer than this, something that I could not define, but that conveyed the notion, however indeterminately, of equality. I thought of my fancy that we had 'recognised' each other the night before. Surely that fancy contained the germ of the true understanding, of the conceptions of affinity and remembrance.

No tie of our present earth life could be weighed against that idea of a spirit love, enduring through

the ages; a love transcending and immortal, repeating itself in ever ascending stages of rapture. The flesh was but a passing instrument of temporal expression, a gross medium through which the spirit could speak only in poor, inarticulate phrases of its magnificent recognition of an eternal bond. . . . Oh ! I was soon high in the air again, riding my new Pegasus through the loftiest altitudes of lonely exaltation. I was a conqueror while I had the world to myself. But when at last I heard the rustle of a woman's dress on the path behind me, I was nothing more than a shy, self-conscious product of the twentieth century, all too painfully aware of his physical shortcomings.

She came and stood beside me at the gate, without speaking; and my mind was so full of her, so intoxicated with the splendour of my imaginings, that I thought she must surely share my new-found certainty that we had met once more after an age of separation. I waited, trembling, for her to begin. I knew that any word of mine would inevitably precipitate the bathos of a civilised conversation. I was incapable of expressing my own thought, but I hoped that she, with her magic voice, might accomplish a miracle that was beyond my feeble powers. Indeed, I could imaginatively frame for her, speech that I could not, myself, deliver. I knew what I wanted her to say—or to imply. For it was hardly necessary for her to say

anything. I was ready, wholly sympathetic and receptive. If she would but give me the least sign that she understood, I could respond, though I was so unable to give any sign myself.

I came down from my clouds with a feeling of bitter disappointment, a sense of waking from perfect dreams to the realisation of a hard, inimical world, when she said in a formal voice.

'It's after eleven. My mother and father have gone to bed.'

'Is he—is he in any way reconciled?' I asked, and I think I tried to convey something of resentment by my tone. I still believed that she must guess.

'In a way,' she said, and sighed rather wearily.

'It must have been very hard for him to make up his mind so quickly—to such a change,' I agreed politely.

'It was easier than I expected,' she said. 'He was so practical. Just at first, of course, while Mr Jervaise was there, he seemed broken. I didn't know what we should do. I was almost afraid that he would refuse to come. But afterwards he—well, he squared his shoulders. He is magnificent. He's as solid as a rock. He didn't once reproach us. He seemed to have made up his mind; only one thing frightened him. . . .'

'What was that?' I asked, as she paused.

'That we haven't any capital to speak of,' she said. 'Even after we have sold the furniture here,

we shan't have more than five or six hundred pounds so far as we can make out. And he says it isn't enough. He says that he and mother are too old to start again from small beginnings. And—oh! a heap of practical things. He is so slow in some ways that it startled us all to find out how shrewd he was about this. It was his own subject, you see.'

'There needn't be any difficulty about capital,' I said eagerly. I had hardly had patience for her to finish her speech. From her first mention of that word 'capital' I had seen my chance to claim a right in the Banks's fortunes.

'I don't see . . .' she began, and then checked herself and continued stiffly, 'My father would never accept help of any kind.'

'Arthur might—from a friend,' I said.

'He thinks we've got enough—to begin with,' she replied. 'They've been arguing about it. Arthur's young and certain. Father isn't either, and he's afraid of going to a strange country—and failing.'

'But in that case Arthur must give way,' I said.

Anne was silent for a moment and then said in a horribly formal voice. 'Am I to understand, Mr Melhuish, that you are proposing to lend Arthur this money?'

'On any terms he likes,' I agreed warmly.

'Why?'

I could not mistake her intention. I knew that

she expected me to say that it was for her sake. I was no less certain that if I did say that she would snub me. Her whole tone and manner since she had come out to the gate had challenged me. 'Here we are alone in the moonlight,' her attitude had said. 'You've been trying to hint some kind of admiration for me ever since we met. Now, let us get that over and finished with, so that we can discuss this business of my father's.'

'Because I like him,' I said. 'I haven't known him long, of course; only a few hours altogether; but . . . ' I stopped because I was afraid she would think that the continuation of the argument might be meant to apply to her rather than to Arthur; and I had no intention of pleading by innuendo. When I did speak, I meant to speak directly, and there was but one thing I had to say. If that failed, I was ready to admit that I had been suffering under a delusion.

'Well?' she prompted me.

'That's all,' I said.

'Weren't you going to say that it wasn't how long you'd known a person that mattered?'

'It certainly didn't matter in Arthur's case,' I said. 'I liked him from the first moment I saw him. It's true that we had been talking for some time before there was light enough for me to see him.'

'You like him so much that you'd be willing to lend him all the money he wanted, without security?' she asked.

'Yes, all the money I have,' I said.

'Without any—any sort of condition?'

'I should make one condition,' I replied.

'Which is?'

'That he'd let me come and stay with him, and Brenda, and all of you—on the farm.'

'And, of course, we should all have to be very nice to you, and treat you as our benefactor—our proprietor, almost,' she suggested cruelly.

I was hurt, and for a moment I was inclined to behave much as young Turnbull had behaved that afternoon, to turn away and sulk, and show that I had been grievously misunderstood. I overcame that impulse, however. 'I shouldn't expect you to curtsy!' I said.

She turned to me with one of her instant changes of mood.

'Why don't you tell me the truth?' she asked passionately.

'The truth *you* mean hasn't anything whatever to do with what we're talking about now,' I said.

'Oh! but it has. It must have,' she protested. 'Aren't you trying to buy my good-will all the time? All this is so heroic and theatrical. Aren't you being the splendid benefactor of one of your own plays—being frightfully tactful and oh! *gentlemanly*? It wouldn't be the right thing, of course, to—to put any sort of pressure on me; but you could put us all under every sort of obligation to you, and afterwards—when you came to

stay with us—you'd be very forbearing and sad, no doubt, and be very sweet to my mother—she likes you already—but every one would know just why; and you'd all expect me—to—to do the right thing, too.'

If I had not been truly in love with her I should have been permanently offended by that speech. It stung me. What she implied was woundingly true of that old self of mine which had so recently come under my observation and censure. I could see that; and yet if any one but Anne had accused me I should have gone off in high dudgeon. The hint of red in my hair would not permit me to accept insult with meekness. And while I was still seeking some way to avoid giving expression to my old self, whose influence was painfully strong just then, she spoke again.

'Now you're offended,' she said.

I avoided a direct answer by saying, 'What you accused me of thinking and planning might have been true of me yesterday; it isn't true, now.'

'Have you changed so much since yesterday?' she asked, as if she expected me to confess, now, quite in the familiar manner. She had given me an opportunity for the proper continuation. I refused it.

'I have only one claim on you,' I said boldly.

'Well?' she replied impatiently.

'You recognised me last night.'

It was very like her not to fence over that. She had a dozen possible equivocations, but she suddenly met me with no attempt at disguise.

'I *thought* I did,' she said. 'Just for a minute.'

'And now? You know . . .?'

She leaned her elbows on the gate and stared out over the moonlit mysteries of the Park.

'You're not a bit what I expected,' she said.

I misunderstood her. 'But you can't . . .'
I began.

'To look at,' she interrupted me.

I felt a thrill of hope. 'But neither are you,'
I said.

'Oh!' she commented softly.

'I've had romantic visions, too,' I went on; 'of what she would look like when I did meet her. But when I saw you, I remembered, and all the visions—oh! scattered; vanished into thin air.'

'If you hadn't been so successful . . .' she murmured.

'I'm sorry for that,' I agreed. 'But I'm going to make amends. I realised it all this afternoon in the wood when I went to meet Arthur. I'm going to begin all over again, now. I'm coming to Canada—to work.' The whole solution of my problem was suddenly clear, although I had not guessed it until that moment. 'I'm going to buy a farm for all of us,' I went on quickly, 'and all the money that's over, I shall give away. The hospitals are always willing to accept money without

asking why you give it. They're not suspicious, *they* don't consider themselves under any obligation.'

'How much should you have to give away?' she asked.

'Thirty or forty thousand pounds,' I said. 'It depends on how much the farm costs.'

'Hadn't you better keep a little, in case the farm fails?' she put in.

'It won't fail,' I said. 'How could it?'

'And you'd do all that just because you've—remembered me?'

'There was another influence,' I admitted.

'What was that?' she asked, with the sound of new interest in her voice.

'All this affair with the Jervaises,' I said. 'It has made me hate the possession of money and the power money gives. That farm of ours is going to be a communal farm. Our workers shall have an interest in the profits. No one is to be the proprietor. We'll all be one family—no scraping for favours, or fears of dismissal; we'll all be equal and free.'

She did not answer that, at once; and I had an unpleasant feeling that she was testing my quality by some criterion of her own, weighing the genuineness of my emotion.

'Did you feel like this about things this afternoon?' she asked, after what seemed to me an immense interval.

I was determined to tell her nothing less than

the truth. 'No,' I confessed, 'much of it was a result of what you said to me. I—I had an illumination. You made me see what a poor thing my life had been; how conventional, artificial, worthless, it was. What you said about my plays was so true. I had never realised it before—I hadn't bothered to think about it.'

'I don't remember saying anything about your plays,' she interrupted me.

'Oh! you did,' I assured her; 'very little; nothing directly; but I knew what you felt, and when I came to think it over, I agreed with you.'

'I've only seen *one*,' she remarked.

'They're all the same,' I assured her, becoming fervent in my humility.

'But why go to Canada?' she asked. 'Why not try to write better plays?'

'Because I saw my whole life plainly, in the wood this afternoon,' was my reply. 'I did not know what to do then. I couldn't see any answer to my problem. But when you were speaking to me a minute ago, I realised the whole thing clearly. I understood what I wanted to do.'

'It's a form of conversion,' I concluded resolutely.

'I'm sure you mean it all—now,' she commented, as if she were speaking to herself.

'It isn't a question of *meaning* anything,' I replied. 'The experiences of this week-end have put the whole social question in a new light for me. I could never go back, now, to the old life.'

My conscience would always be reproaching me, if I did.'

'But if you're rich, and feel like that, oughtn't you to shoulder your responsibilities?' she asked. 'Do something? Wouldn't it be rather like running away to give your money to the hospitals and go to Canada to work on a farm?'

'That's my present impulse,' I said. 'And I mean to follow it. I don't know that I shall want to stay in Canada for the rest of my life. I may see further developments after I've been there for a few years. But . . .'

'Go on,' she urged me.

'But I want to—to stay near you—all of you. I can't tell you how I admire your father and mother and Arthur and—all of you. And you see, I admit that this conversion of mine has been very sudden. I—I want to learn.'

'Do you always follow your impulses like this?' she put in.

'I've never had one worth following before,' I said.

'What about wanting to fight Frank Jervaise?' she asked. 'And running away from the Hall? And suddenly taking Arthur's side in the row? and all those things? Didn't you follow your impulses, then?'

And yet, it had never before occurred to me that I was impulsive. I had imagined myself to be self-controlled, rather business-like, practical.

I was frankly astonished at this new light on my character.

'I suppose I did, in a way,' I admitted doubtfully.

'To say nothing of . . . ' she began, and stopped with a little, rather embarrassed laugh.

'Of what?' I urged her.

'How many times before have you imagined yourself to be head over ears in love?' she asked.

I was repaid in that moment for all the self-denials and fastidious shrinkings of my youth.

'Never once!' I acclaimed triumphantly. 'It's the one common experience that has passed me by. I've often wondered why I could never fall in love. I've admired any number of women. I've tried to fall in love with them. And I have never been able to, try as I would. I could deceive myself about other things, but never about that. Now, I know why.'

I waited for her encouragement, but as she did not speak I went on with more hesitation. 'You'll think me a romantic fool, I suppose, if I tell you why?'

'Oh! I know, I know,' she said. 'You've told me already in so many words. You mean that you've been waiting for me; that you *had* to wait for me. You've been very frank. You deserve some return. Shall I tell you just how I feel? I will. I don't mind telling you the truth, too. I did remember you last night. But not since; not even now. But I like you—I like you very

much—as you are this evening. More than I’ve ever liked any man before. And if you went away, I should remember you; and want you to come back. But you must give me time. Lots of time. Don’t make love to me any more; not yet; not till I’ve really remembered. I think I shall—in a little while—when you’ve gone away. You’re so near me, now. And so *new*. You don’t belong to my life, yet.’

She paused and then went on in another tone. ‘But I believe you’re right about Canada. I’ll explain it all to the others. We’ll make some kind of arrangement about it. I expect it will have to be *your* farm, nominally, for a time—until we all know you better. I can feel that you do—that you have taken a tremendous fancy to all of us. I felt it just now, after supper. I was watching you and—oh! well, I knew what you were feeling about my father and mother; and it seemed to be just what I should have liked you to feel. But I don’t think I would give *all* my money to the hospitals, if I were you. Not without thinking it over a bit, first. Wait until we get to Canada and see—how we get on.’

‘You don’t trust my impulses,’ I said.

She laughed. ‘Wait till to-morrow anyway,’ she replied.

And as she spoke I heard far away, across the Park, the sound of the stable-clock at the Hall, striking twelve. The artificial sound of it was

mellowed and altered by distance; as different from that theatrical first striking I had noticed in the exciting atmosphere of the crowd, as was my present state of mind from that in which I had expectantly waited the coming of romance. . . .

'To-morrow begins now,' I said.

'And I have to be up before six,' she added, in the formal voice she knew so well how to assume.

I felt as though she had by that one return to civility cancelled all that she said, and as we turned back to the house, I began to wonder whether the promise of my probation was as assured as I had, a minute earlier, so confidently believed.

We were nearly at the little porch that would for ever be associated in my mind with the fumbling figure of Frank Jervaise, when she said, 'One moment. I'll get you something,' and left me standing in almost precisely the same spot from which I had gazed up at her window the night before.

She returned almost immediately, but it was not until we were inside the house and she had lighted my candle that she gave me the 'something,' pressing it into my hand with a sudden delicious, girlish embarrassment.

She was gone before I recognised that the precious thing she had given me was a sprig of Rosemary.

POSTSCRIPT

THE TRUE STORY

It was by the merest accident that we gathered that delightful piece of information—on our first trip to England, not quite three years after we were married.

I did not know that *The Mulberry Bush* had been revived for a few weeks as a stop-gap, until we saw the boards outside the theatre. Anne insisted that we should go in, and the arbiters of coincidence ordained that I should take seats in the stalls immediately behind one of those well-informed society women who know the truth about everything.

We were somewhat amused by her omniscience during the first interval, but it was not until the second that she came to the priceless report of our own two selves.

I was not listening to her when she began, but Anne's sudden grasp of my arm and the inclination of her head, awoke me to the fact that the gossip just in front of us must, for some reason or other, be instantly attended to.

There was a good deal of chatter going on in the auditorium and I missed an occasional sentence here and there in addition to the opening, but there could be no doubt as to the application of the reminiscence I heard.

'Got himself into a scrape and had to leave the country,' was the first thing that reached me. 'As a matter of fact I had the whole story from someone who was actually staying in the house at the time.' She dropped her voice as she added something confidentially of which I only caught the sound of the name Jervaise. Anne was squeezing my arm violently.

'Yes, his father's house,' the gossip continued in answer to a question from her companion. 'A young man of great promise. He took silk last year, and is safe for a place in the Cabinet sooner or later.'

'Our Frank,' Anne whispered.

I nodded and waited eagerly, although I had not, then, realised my own connection with the story.

'Oh! yes, that other affair was four years ago—nothing to do with the dear Jervaises, except for the unfortunate fact that they were entertaining him at the time. He ran away with a farmer's daughter; eloped with her in the middle of a dance the Jervaises were giving. Never seen her before that evening, I believe. The father was one of the Jervaises' tenants. . . . A superior kind of young woman in some ways, I've heard; and a friend of the youngest Jervaise girl . . . you wouldn't remember her . . . she went with her friend to Australia or somewhere . . . some quixotic idea of protecting her, I believe . . . and married out there. The farmer's name was Baggs. The whole family were a trifle queer, and emigrated afterwards . . . yes, it

was a pity about Melhuish, in a way. He was considered quite a promising young dramatist. This thing of his was a distinct success. Very amusing. But naturally, no one would receive him after he'd married this Baggs girl. Besides which . . .'

But at that point the orchestra began, the woman dropped her voice again, and the only other fragment I heard was, ' . . . after the disgraceful scene at the dance . . . quite impossible. . . '

I looked at Anne and was surprised to find that she was white with indignation.

'I must tell them,' she whispered passionately.

'Oh! no, please,' I whispered back. 'They wouldn't believe you. It would only add another shocking detail to the next exposition of the scandal.'

'Detestable people,' she said, in a voice that must have been heard by our gossip, although she evidently did not realise the application of the description to herself and her friend.

'Let's be thankful,' I whispered to Anne, 'that I'm no longer writing this sort of piffle to amuse them. If it hadn't been for you . . . '

The two women had left the theatre before the end of the third act, but long before that Anne had seen the humour of this true story of our elopement.



9.H-1/4/31

156280

LE
B491je

Author Beresford, John Davys

Title The Jervaise comedy.

University of Toronto
Library

DO NOT
REMOVE
THE
CARD
FROM
THIS
POCKET

Acme Library Card Pocket
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File"
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU

